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No. 41.

A TALE OF MODERN BLACK ART.

"MARKED FOR A VICTIM."

A Thrilling Story of Love and Mysticism.

BY

STUART CUMBERLAND,

Thought Reader, Occultist and Psychologist.

J. S. OGILVIE, PUBLISHER, 57 Rose St., New York; 182 Wabash Ave., Chicago.

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"MARKED FOR A VICTIM."

PROLOGUE.

A SHADOW OVER A BIRTHDAY.

At the close of a delicious day in a large room of a handsome London house Miss Evelyn Hardcastle was reclining in an immense chair upon which cushions of down had been thrown. She was a fitting inmate for the room in which she was placed. Soft silken fabrics hung on the walls. The entrances to the room were concealed by portières of the most richly embroidered stuffs. The thick carpet muffled every sound and felt like moss to the feet of one who trod upon it. Quaint old furniture graced the room. Chairs and cabinets of quartered oak old enough to be black with age, beautiful specimens of carved teak wood and rare bits of inlaid work—all these were about in profusion.

It was a bower of luxury, and the beautiful

young woman who almost lay at length upon the downy cushion of the huge chair was the fitting mistress of such luxury in her surroundings. Her features were as delicate and as exquisitely turned as those of one of Canova's masterpieces. The clear white forehead and the mass of golden hair that clustered about it, the dainty mouth with its subtle curves and

HE NOTED THE PECULIARITY OF HER EYES.

ruddy lips, and the transparent skin of pure white suffused into the most delicate pink made her an entrancing object.

But her eyes were the most striking feature of her lovely face. Large, lustrous and of the deepest blue, they peeped from beneath the long silken lashes like jewels. There was

something peculiar in those eyes. The lids were but little parted and the irises were so large that they seemed almost black. They were as brilliant as polished agate, and gleamed from the fringes of her superb lashes like stars piercing some cloud.

Her lips were parted. She had let her book fall to the ground. It was a volume of love poems, intense and almost Oriental in their passionate imagery. They seemed to have steeped her in a languorous glow, for there was a voluptuous yielding in her beautiful form that sank, half buried, into the light down cushions, while her face warmed with the pensive glow of her happy thoughts.

They were thoughts that a lover would have been glad to learn were for himself. In her Grecian beauty she seemed made for love and brightness and happy years—years that should deal lightly with her smooth, fair brow, her damask cheek and the glittering brilliancy of her glorious eyes. Life with bounding health and all the glamour of happy love seemed the prerogative of such a dower of loveliness as hers.

At last, she heaved a slight sigh, and a smile stole to her ruby lips. Then she murmured softly to herself:

"Twenty-one to-day! What good fortune

will my birthday bring me in addition to what it has given?"

Her thoughts were off again in the teeming fields of fancy, roaming in the exuberance of happy womanhood.

Care had never touched her. Such as she was now she had ever been from childhood's hour, the spoiled darling of fortune. But no! not spoiled. Her sweet face was full of nobleness even in the pleased smile that stole to her lips as she dreamed of what life had yet to unfold for her. What love awaited her? What conquests?

At this moment the portières were pushed aside and a young man entered the room. The face of the fair maid lit up with a radiant smile of welcome as she recognized him, and the long-fringed lids were lifted and the splendid dusky blue of her eyes shone radiantly upon him.

"Why, my darling, birthdays agree with you, it would seem? I must say something pretty, I suppose. You really do not look your twenty-one years. You are ready, I see, for the gay joys of to-night. Upon my word, your eyes are like loadstones. Are they black or blue? What a way they have of stealing out

from that curtain of fringes which the lashes make. I never saw such eyes in my life."

"There, you have said enough even for my twenty-first birthday," said the girl. She had risen, and the beautiful proportions and contour of her exquisite form were fully revealed. As she slightly turned her head and glanced at him, her lover gave a start which her quick

CHIEF OF POLICE WARREN WAS PUZZLED.

glance at once detected. He folded her tightly in his arms and breathed quickly, while she looked wonderingly at him.

"Darling, your eyes! How like they are to hers! As you turned that moment I recalled the expression of the face of your unfortunate friend, as I have seen it in your album many a time and as I saw it to-day on the public bul-

letins in the street. What a fate was hers! And what a strange affinity is this!"

The young man shuddered with a horror he could not name, and pressed his affianced close to his breast. Then the girl freed herself from his passionate embrace and said:

"You foolish boy! do not think such naughty, frightful thoughts. See! I have a present which may be a talisman. It is Uncle Lal's offering to me."

She loosened the front of her dress and drew forth a quaint locket. It was shaped like a heart, and in the centre blazed a diamond gem. Strange cabalistic symbols were marked upon it, and the workmanship, though deft, was of most unusual fashion.

"There is a lock of hair inside," she added archly. Then as her lover's face grew pained she quickly added: "But it is snow white."

"Why do you wear so precious a thing concealed beneath your gown?" he asked.

"Because," she answered "those signs," and she pointed to the strange blurred symbols on the locket, "mean, 'I am the shield of the heart that I cover.'"

She slipped it again in her bosom. When her lover left her, as he was walking through the hall, a thought struck him, and he clasped

his hands about his head, groaning: "Good God: Her twenty-first birthday."

CHAPTER I.

THE SERIES OF TRAGEDIES THAT EXCITED ALL LONDON.

THERE was great excitement in the Strand. Newspaper boys were rushing wildly hither and thither, displaying placards announcing the committal of another of the mysterious murders which had startled all London.

Almost every person one met was eagerly reading the particulars in the newspaper he carried, while little knots formed themselves at the corners of the streets excitedly discussing the affair,

The murder in question was the ninth that had been committed within the last nine months, and it had been carried out in precisely the same manner as the preceding eight.

The victim, as in the previous cases, was a woman, and was both young and beautiful.

"When will this reign of terror end? When will the mystery which surrounds these murders be unravelled and the diabolical assassin be

brought to book? When?" asked the *Charing Cross Gazette*, which contained a fuller account of the tragedy than the other evening newspapers.

"It is horrible; it is terrible," continued the paper, "and the police seem to be as far off as ever in the matter of clues. What is the use of a police? What is the use of a Chief Commissioner? What is the use of a Home Secretary if murders such as these can be committed with impunity?

"According to the police each murder committed was to have been the last, and yet victim after victim has been done to death without a trace of the hand which did the awful deed being discovered. And now we have the ninth victim, and, as she is the daughter of a distinguished officer and a niece of a peer and intimate with the influential Hardcastle family, extra efforts may possibly be made to bring the murderer to justice.

"Eight murders have failed to bring the Chief Commissioner to a sense of his duty, but this, the ninth and latest, may open his eyes."

The *Charing Cross Gazette* continued its account of the mysterious tragedies in its next issue:

"Below we publish a list of the murders which have been committed during the past eight months. They are all undoubtedly by the same hand, and the murderer—alas that such a thing should be!—is still at large.

"NO. 1—FLORRIE GREY, A SEAMSTRESS.

"The first of these murders took place on the night of the 11th or on the morning of the 12th of February of this year. The victim was a girl of the people, a seamstress, living at 205 India street, Islington. Her name was Florrie Grey, aged twenty-one. She was found lying in her bed about 8 o'clock on Sunday morning the 12th, stabbed through the heart with a poisoned dagger. No other outrage appeared to have been offered her, and no motive assigned for the crime. She was a highly respectable hard-working girl, without, so far as was discovered, an enemy in the world. Several arrests were made, but nothing came of them, and to this day the assassin remains at large.

"NO. 2—AN UNKNOWN FLOWER-GIRL.

"Early in the evening of the 13th of March an unknown girl, apparently not more than twenty-one, was found in one of the courts

leading out of Fleet street done to death in a manner precisely similar to the above. She had met her fate some hours before she was discovered by a dagger thrust through the heart. The wound was the same size—viz., a small puncture from which oozed a clot of blood—as that found on the body of poor Florrie Grey, and the medical evidence went to prove that

SHE HAD DIED FROM THE POISONED DAGGER THRUST.

the same poisoned dagger had been used. The unknown victim was a flower-girl, and some bunches of crushed violets were found in her stiffened hand. The body was never identified and the crime, like the preceding one, was, so far as could be ascertained, absolutely motiveless.

"NO. 3—THE VICTIM A POPULAR SINGER.

"The murders of Florrie Grey and the unknown flower-girl, while attracting considerable attention at the time, were on the point of being forgotten when all London was aroused by the news that Miss Rose Manton, the popular soprano, had been murdered in her brougham while driving to her home in Regent's park at the conclusion of a concert in St. James's Hall. This was on the evening of April 11, and her death had been brought about by a dagger stab through the heart.

"Suspicion at first rested upon a rejected suitor—an Italian tenor. But he proved an alibi, and the police sought for the murderer—needless to say, without effect—elsewhere. Miss Manton was noted for her kindness of heart and sympathetic nature, and her terrible fate caused a profound sensation.

"Private detectives were employed, and members of the theatrical and musical professions enrolled themselves as assassin hunters, but all to no purpose. The cowardly murderer has never be brought to book.

"NO. 4.—A SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER.

"The popular expectation that the 11th of May—the day of the new moon—would pro-

vide another victim for the unknown murderer was only too fully realized. A young girl, a Sunday-school teacher, Eliza Arnatt by name, was to be the next victim. She was killed on her way through St. James's Park after leaving a West End chapel, where she was one of the singers of the choir. The deed must have been committed about 9 o'clock, for she left a female friend at 8.45 at the park gates, and the body was discovered on a seat at 9.30 by a passer-by. He stated that he heard no cry and that he saw no one leave the spot where the body was found. A hue and cry was at once started and the park scoured; but, in spite of the most diligent search, the murderer was not found. Apparently the same dagger which had sent the three previous victims to their last account had been used on this occasion, and similar traces of poison were found in the wound. Why this poor girl should have been selected none could imagine, while people began to ask themselves who would be the next victim. They had not long to wait for an answer.

"NOS. 5 and 6—TWIN SISTERS.

"On Saturday, June 9, two more victims were sacrificed to the murderous fury of the

mysterious assassin. They were twin sisters, living in Gold street, Kensington. Murray was their name—Daisy and Adelaide, and they were the orphan daughters of a teacher of music. They got their living by giving music lessons and were girls of irreproachable character. They occupied the same bedroom, and were found by the landlady on Saturday evening, at about 8 o'clock, lying dead in their room, clasped in each other's arms, their hearts pierced by a poisoned dagger. They had been murdered betweenthe hours of 5 and 7 P. M. The police, so far as one could judge, did all they could to trace the murderer, but without avail. There is no doubt that these equally motiveless murders were the work of one hand, and that of the wretch who had taken the lives of the other young women.

"NOS. 7 AND 8—MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

"The cup of horrors, which was thought to be full to the brim, was added to, in a manner that makes one's blood run cold to think of, a month ago yesterday.

"The young wife of a civil-service writer, Mr. Harold Fitzgibbon, living at No. 1A Westbury Villas, Maida Vale, was the victim on the 9th of July. In the middle of the night the house-

hold was aroused by a piercing shriek coming from the lady's room.

"On entering the room Mr. Fitzgibbon found the lady's maid in a fainting fit on the floor and his wife stabbed through the heart.

THEY SEARCHED THE PARK FOR THE MURDERER IN VAIN.

The body of his young daughter similarly stabbed was also found cold in death. The agony of the poor man can well be imagined. Here was he made a widower and childless at one fell stroke of the assassin's knife, and that he should have become hopelessly insane

through the shock is not to be wondered at. The stroke which had taken these two innocent lives was unquestionably made with the same weapon that had drunk the life blood of the six previous victims.

"The lady's maid swore that she neither saw nor heard any one come into or leave the room. She admitted having fallen to sleep, during which time the dastardly crimes were committed. It was only upon awaking that she discovered the terrible state of affairs, when she, as has been stated, aroused the household. She was altogether unable to throw any light upon the subject. No arrests were made, and all efforts to find the midnight assassin proved fruitless.

"NO. 9—MISS ULVERSTONE, THE LATEST VICTIM.

"Yet another victim has to be added to this terribly long list of mysterious murders. Yesterday evening at about ten o'clock Miss Geraldine Ulverstone, the only daughter of Gen. Ulverstone, of 14 Faversham Gardens, Notting Hill, niece of Baron Furness, an intimate friend of that well-known belle, Miss Evelyn Hardcastle, was murdered in her own house. As will be seen from particulars in another page the poor young lady was celebrating

her twenty-first birthday, and in the midst of the festivities was suddenly and foully murdered,

"She had gone for a moment it appears to fetch Miss Hardcastle, who was with her, a spray of flowers from the conservatory. No one knows the precise moment she left the drawing-room but her absence was speedily discovered and the question asked as to where she was.

"Miss Hardcastle expressed her belief that she must have gone to the conservatory, as some quarter of an hour before she had promised to get her some roses to take the place of the crushed flowers she was wearing in her dress. 'She evidently wishes to take me by surprise,' added Miss Hardcastle, 'and I will just go and interrupt her in her mission.' And with a laugh the young lady darted off to find her friend. A moment later a shrill agonized scream came from the conservatory.

"On arriving there the General and his guests found Miss Hardcastle, pale and speechless, bending over the body of Miss Ulverstone, which lay motionless on the floor.

"The young lady was quite dead—stabbed through the heart. It was seen at a glance that the terrible poisoned dagger had been used.

"Miss Ulverstone is the latest victim, but is

she the last? We cannot tell, but we fear not. Not a month has past but some one has been sacrificed to the murderous instincts of this unknown assassin. This makes the ninth, but judging from previous events, there will probably be a tenth and eleventh, or even more, before the bloodthirsty wretch is discovered.

"No one is apparently safe from his unaccountable fury. He seems to select his victims at haphazard, being equally at home in the garret of the poor and the mansion of the rich. The victims are in no way related to each other, and, so far as known, they never even knew of each other's existence; so there can be nothing in the nature of a family vendetta which has induced the fiend to take these innocent women's lives.

"We say fiend, for we really have our doubts whether the murderer can be human, and, if he be a being in human guise, whether he does not possess the spirit of a devil."

CHAPTER II.

THE *Charing Cross Gazette* hammered away at the inefficient police day after day.

"Strive as one will," it observed, "one can find neither reason nor motive for such unparalleled atrocities, and it is impossible to understand what connecting link there can be between Florrie Grey, seamstress, an unknown flower-girl, a popular singer, a simple Sunday-school teacher, two orphan sisters, a mother and her child, and the only daughter of a well-known Indian officer.

"That there is some connecting link is, we think, certain; and, although the victims have been selected apparently at haphazard, the important fact must not be overlooked that each woman killed was not only twenty-one years of age, but she was killed on her birthday. The age of the flower-girl was unknown, but her age at the inquest was stated to be about twenty-one. The only exception is the young girl, and why the child was slaughtered by the hand which had just drunk its mother's blood only the slaughterer can tell.

"This age question cannot be a mere coincidence. The murderer has without doubt deliberately made his selections, irrespective of the social position of his victims.

"Another point, which appears to have been altogether overlooked, is that the murdered women bear a striking resemblance to each other, and we should judge from the portrait of Miss Ulverstone in our possession that this young lady is singularly like the other victims.

"Can it be that the murderer is a maniac, who, having been made insane through disappointed love, seeks revenge upon every woman who, in his disturbed fancy, resembles the one who is the cause of his mental derangement? If it be so, then there will—unless the murderer be speedily captured—practically be no limit to the number of his victims.

"It is a horrible idea, and the daring with which the murderer does his work lends color to it.

"The man may be sane, or he may be mad, or he may even be a fiend in human shape (as believers in the supernatural profess to believe), but the thing is to catch him and bring the diabolical crimes home to him. But how?

"Hitherto he had baffled all the efforts of the police, as well of those of the Vigilance

Committees, which have been formed in every part of the metropolis. No stone—so far at least, as private effort has been concerned—has been left unturned, and yet not the remotest clue has been discovered.

"It seems incredible that this time the bloodthirsty wretch could have escaped, for the murder must have been committed almost within sight, and certainly within hearing, of the guests assembled in the drawing-room. Where could he have been in hiding when the unfortunate young lady entered the conservatory, and where could he have disappeared to between the time of committing the murder and the finding of the body? It is only a question of a few minutes, for within twenty minutes of her absence from the room being discovered she was found lying lifeless on the ground, her quivering body telling that the death blow had but just been struck.

"The house, the gardens, indeed the whole neighborhood were immediately scoured, but nothing came of the search.

"Can it be, as has been suggested, that the murderer may be a highly respected man movin the best circles, and that he should be sought for inside, and not outside, of society?

"In the present case this theory would not

hold good, for every guest at General Ulverstone's was a personal friend of the family, and no one was absent from the room either before or during the time Miss Ulverstone was away, and certainly no stranger entered the house the whole evening.

"It behooves the police to make still further efforts to catch the murderer, and all that private enterprise can do should be done towards aiding justice in the matter.

"Meanwhile there appears as usual to be no clue."

The next day the hoardings in all parts of London were covered with the following notice·

MURDER—PARDON.

Whereas, on Aug. 7, at 14 Faversham Gardens, Notting Hill, Geraldine Ulverstone was murdered by some person or persons unknown, the Secretary of State will advise the grant of Her Majesty's gracious pardon to any accomplice not being a person who contrived or actually committed the murder, who shall give such information and evidence as shall lead to the discovery and conviction of the person or persons who committed the murder.

(Signed) THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE OF THE METROPOLIS.

Metropolitan Police office, 4, Whitehall place, Aug, 8, 18—.

Nothing came of the Government offer of a pardon. No one turned Queen's evidence, and the numerous rewards offered for the discovery of the murderer remained unclaimed. It was therefore generally surmised that he had no accomplices.

The murders were the main topic of conversation in all ranks of society. The papers devoted columns daily to a discussion of the subject, and scarcely a sitting passed without questions having bearing upon it being asked in the House.

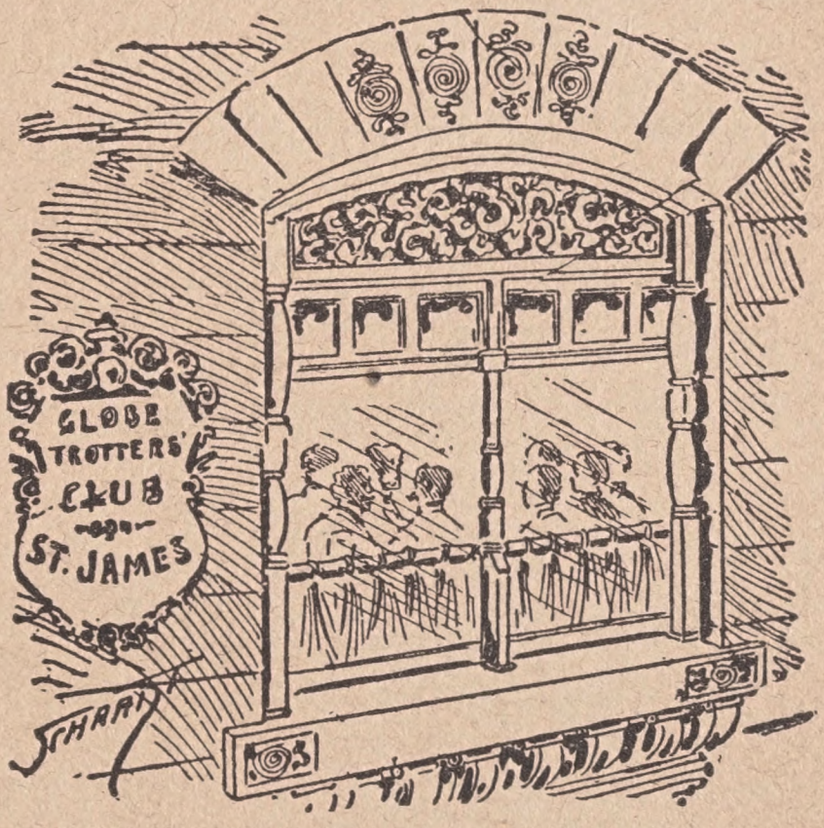
The wildest theories were conjectured and each man was convinced that the view he advanced was the correct solution of the mystery. But, all the same, the mysterious assassin remained undiscovered, and all the supposed clues led to nothing.

A few evenings after the murder of Miss Ulverstone, a number of members were sitting in the smoking-room of the Globe Trotters' Club, St. James's, discussing the all-absorbing question of the hour.

"I am more convinced than ever," said a well-known mad doctor, "that my theory is the correct one. The murderer is a discharged

lunatic. Twenty-seven out of every twenty-eight days he is as sane as you or I; but on the twenty-eighth, with the budding of the new moon, he develops homicidal mania, and, dagger in hand, goes forth on his errand of murder."

"That may be," remarked a criminal lawyer



AT THE GLOBE TROTTER'S CLUB-HOUSE.

sitting next to him; "but how does he manage to escape detection? Besides, in his lucid moments he would, I presume, read the newspapers and be acquainted with the fact of these murders having been committed, and with the blood-stained dagger in his possession, he would, I should imagine, connect himself with

the murders, and in his agony of mind run the risk of betraying himself if he did not actually give himself up."

"Not at all," replied the doctor. "He doubtless reads the papers, but instead of connecting himself with the murders, he would in all probability view with execration the committal of such bloody deeds. And as far as the dagger is concerned, I feel convinced that immediately after the victim has been killed, he, while still insane, hides the weapon, and only fetches it from its hiding-place when the homicidal fit is next on him. In such case he, in his lucid intervals would know nothing of the dagger or the place where it was hid."

"I never thought of that," replied the lawyer.

"I have, but I cannot accept the theory." It was an eminent author who spoke.

"How so?" asked the mad doctor somewhat testily.

"Well, that sort of thing might be likely to be done in the solitude of the American backwoods, where a man, having murdered his victims, might return unobserved to his unknown lair; but in a crowded city like London, where everyone is on the lookout and where everyone suspects the other of being the murderer, such a man could not pass unnoticed. He

must live somewhere, and his daily habits would, I presume, be in distinct contrast to those of the day on which the murder fit takes possession of him.

"Hear me out," sharply added the author as the doctor made an exclamation of dissent. "I know perfectly well what you are going to say. You would point out that this is not necessarily so; but I maintain that it is, and that however cunning your maniac may be he would not be able to escape the watch that is everywhere kept upon any man, woman or child who may show the slightest oddity of manner. No, sir, unless your madman possesses the ring of Gyges and has the power of making himself invisible at will I cannot see how your theory can hold good."

"What is your theory, then?" said the doctor with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"Well, to tell the truth, I have no particular theory; but these murders remind me of a strange affair that occurred in Paris some five and twenty years ago; and the solution of that mystery may possibly apply to the present case."

He paused, and the members drew nearer to hear what he had to say.

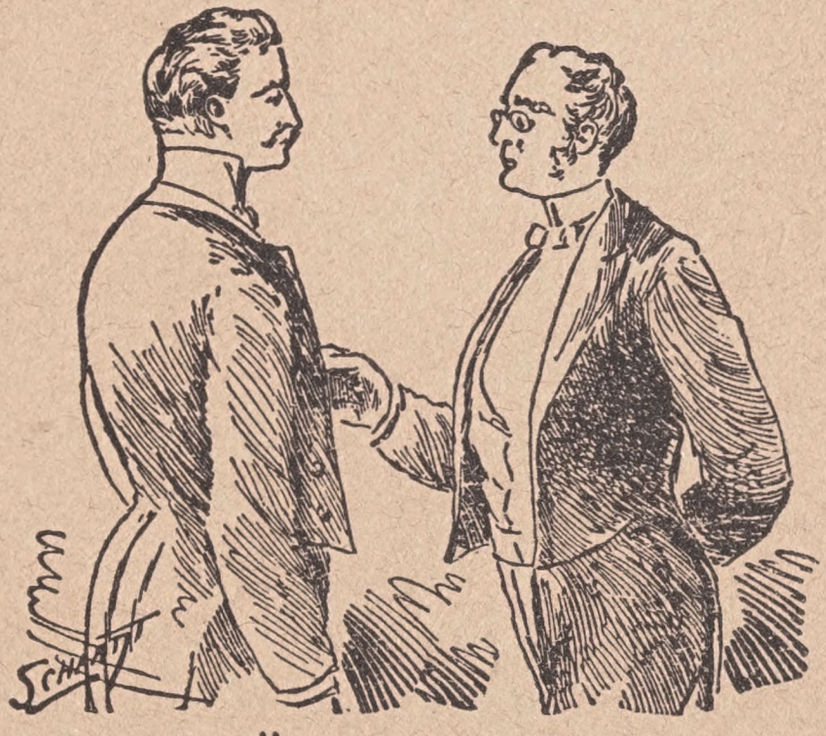
"The affair to which I refer," resumed the

distinguished author, addressing the interesting group at the Globe Trotters' Club, "briefly was as follows:

"A rich banker, living in a splendid chateau at Versailles, was one morning found dead in his bed with his throat cut. He had, so far as could be discovered, not an enemy in the world, and as nothing in the house had been disturbed, robbery was evidently not the object of the murder. The banker had a wife (who was absent from home at the time) and an only daughter who was inconsolable at her father's loss. Every effort was made on the part of the police to trace the murderer, but nothing came of it. The whole of the servants were arrested and closely examined, but their innocence was proved beyond doubt.

"A month went by, when all Paris was startled by the news that the widow, who had returned to the chateau on hearing of the death of her husband, had been murdered in precisely the same fashion. Again were the servants arrested, with nothing being found against them, and the police failed once more to get any clue to the actual murderer. There was no one on whom suspicion could be fastened, and the matter was on the point of being forgotten when a famous mental scientist,

deeply interested in the psychological aspects of crime, made a discovery which gave a solution to the mystery. While the detectives, after being convinced of the innocence of the domestics, were actively searching elsewhere for the criminal, the doctor contented himself with examining the daughter.



"HEAR ME OUT," SHARPLY SAID THE AUTHOR.

"To all appearance she was overwhelmed with grief at the death of her parents; so much so, in fact, that she was, through the shock to her system, confined to her bed for some time afterwards. It was during her illness that the famous doctor was called in, and he had exceptional opportunities of watching her. The first thing he discovered was that she was highly hysterical, and the next thing that she was

sensitive to so-called mesmeric influences. In order, during a fit of nervous depression, to quiet her he tried his hand at hypnotizing her, and with remarkable success. It was while in this hypnotized state that his suspicions were aroused, and when she had recovered her health he determined to try an experiment which

SHE OPENS THE BOX IN HER TRANCE.

would definitely decide whether his suspicious were well or ill founded.

"The murders, so far as could be judged. had been committed betwecn 12 P. M. and 6 A. M. At midnight the doctor proceeded to mesmerize the young girl in her own room. He was not long in getting her into a subjec-

tive state, and, when he had succeeded in this, he proceeded with the further stages of his plan.

"'You have something to do, and you must do it,' he said.

"The girl shivered and stood irresolute for awhile. Then, moving towards a box containing a portion of her wardrobe, she said: 'Your will, André, must be obeyed.'

"She opened the box, and from the bottom fetched a blood-stained razor. She looked at it with horror in her eyes.

"'Must I, André?—must I?' she said pleadingly. 'O spare me this.' And she fell upon her kness in a beseeching attitude. For several moments she knelt thus praying of some one to spare her doing a deed which she abhorred. But this some one apparently did not heed her, for she finally arose with a look of utter dejection on her face.

"'It must be; it must be! (and she wrung her hands). O God, forgive me.'

"With this she wept. Then drying her eyes and bracing herself together for a final effort, she staggered rather than walked out of the room.

"She went direct to the room occupied by her father on the night of the murder, followed by the doctor and those who were witnesses of

the experiment, She opened the door cautiously and entered the room. At the bedside she paused. Here her agitation was extreme, and she seemed on the point of turning and retracing her steps, when, as if impelled by an irresistible inward force, she bent over the bed, muttering as she did so: 'It is his will, his will, and I must do it. God forgive me.'

"With this she reached out her left hand, as if in the act of placing it upon a sleeping person's mouth, and then, with the razor in her right hand, she made sundry slashes below the pillow.

"'Now, André,' she said, gazing earnestly at the bed, 'your will is done.' Returning to her room she hid the razor in the box, poured out some water and washed her hands, emptying the contents of the basin down a cistern, which she swilled clean with fresh water. Then she lay down.

"After a little while the doctor commenced further operations and impressed upon her that she had something else to do.

"She arose greatly agitated.

"'Not that, André—not that; anything but that. I did your will before, but spare her. For the love of God spare her.' She held up her hands supplicatingly. Then, after a pause,

she continued. 'Must it be? Must it be? Has not enough blood already been shed? Why her life? Oh, take mine and spare hers. . . . No, you will not release me from my vow. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!'—wringing her hands. Then she added after a pause, 'As you wish so must I do.' She again left her room and this

THE ARREST OF ANDRE MASSINET.

time proceeded to the chamber that had been occupied by her murdered mother, where she went through much the same action as before.

"There was no doubt in the minds of those who were witnesses of this strange performance that the young girl was the actual murderess, and that she had committed the murders while

under the influence of mesmerism. But who was the mesmerizer? Inquiries were at once made, and the fact discovered that the girl, while at Trouville, the Summer before, had formed an illicit intercourse with a *chevalier d'industrie*, kind of Prado, named André Massinet. He was arrested and after a while made a confession of his guilt. He explained how he had establisbed an influence over his victim, and while in a mesmeric state he had impressed upon her the necessity of killing both her father and mother for the sake of their wealth. He willed her to do this while in Paris, where he was living at the time, with the fatal result I have described. When the girl heard of her seducer's confession, the knowledge of her guilt (for be it understood she was absolutely unconscious of the part she had played) caused her to become hopelessly insane. Massinet escaped the guillotine by poisoning himself while in prison."

"Well," said the mad doctor when the speaker had finished, "what has that got to do with the present case?"

"A good deal," was the quiet reply.

"Surely you don't believe that a mesmerizer has made some one over whom he has estab-

lished an influence, commit the present murders?" asked the doctor.

"Of course nothing is certain, but I cannot help thinking that a solution of the mystery may be found in something of the kind."

"That is absurd," was the impolite rejoinder. "What motive could a mesmerizer have in causing such murders to be committed? How is your mesmerized subject to have access to his various victims undiscovered?"

"You mistake me, I did not say that all the murders were the work of one hand. The mesmerizer may have had a subject for each murder, and the diverse social position of the unfortunate victims lends color to my view."

"That cannot be," replied the doctor, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders; "you forget that to all appearances the same dagger was used in each case."

"To all appearances, yes," said the author; "but appearances are delusive. Is it beyond question that the same dagger was used?

"Quite!" The speaker was Dr. Harvey, a famous young analyst, who, by the bye, was engaged to Miss Hardcastle. "I have seen the bodies of all the victims, and I have no doubt that each murder was the work of the

same hand, and that the same weapon was used in each case."

"That settles it," said the author, somewhat discomforted: "but still that fact does not disprove my theory that the murders may have been committed by some one while under the influence of mesmerism."

At this moment a tall, commanding figure joined the group.

"My dear Mansfield, when did you come back?" cried Dr. Harvey, warmly shaking him by the hand. "You of all men are the most likely to throw some light upon this terrible mystery."

CHAPTER III.

THE new-comer, Col. Mansfield, was a very distinguished man. He had held high posts in the Indian diplomatic service, including that of the chief of the Thuggee and Dacoity Department, and of the ways and customs of the native races he probably knew more than any living Englishman.

He was a great linguist, speaking most European and Eastern languages, including the *patois* of the hill tribes of Northern India,

fluently. The natives trusted him, and he had great influence over them, and it was solely owing to his tact that many a diplomatic difficulty was smoothed over, and to his influence that certain serious acts of rebellion were averted.

Col. Mansfield had dipped deeply into the sacred writings of the Hindoos and was greatly learned in what is termed the Occultism of the East. Since his retirement from active service he had devoted himself to special investigation into the Indian mysteries, which to the Europeans are, as of yore, a sealed book. He had penetrated into the mountain fastnesses of Thibet, the snowy solitudes of the Himalayas and the untrodden jungles of Burmah in search of knowledge. He had commenced with aged Brahmins, learned pundits, holy fakirs and mysterious hermits, who, living as they did in immediate contact with the active forces of nature, possess secrets unknown to ordinary men.

It was rumored in official circles that while in Thibet he had been initiated in the sacred circles of adepts, and certain zealous missionaries averred that he had sold himself to the devil. But whether Col. Mansfield had become a Theosophist or had allowed his soul to be

come the possession of His Satanic Majesty or not, it was an indisputable fact that he was not like ordinary men.

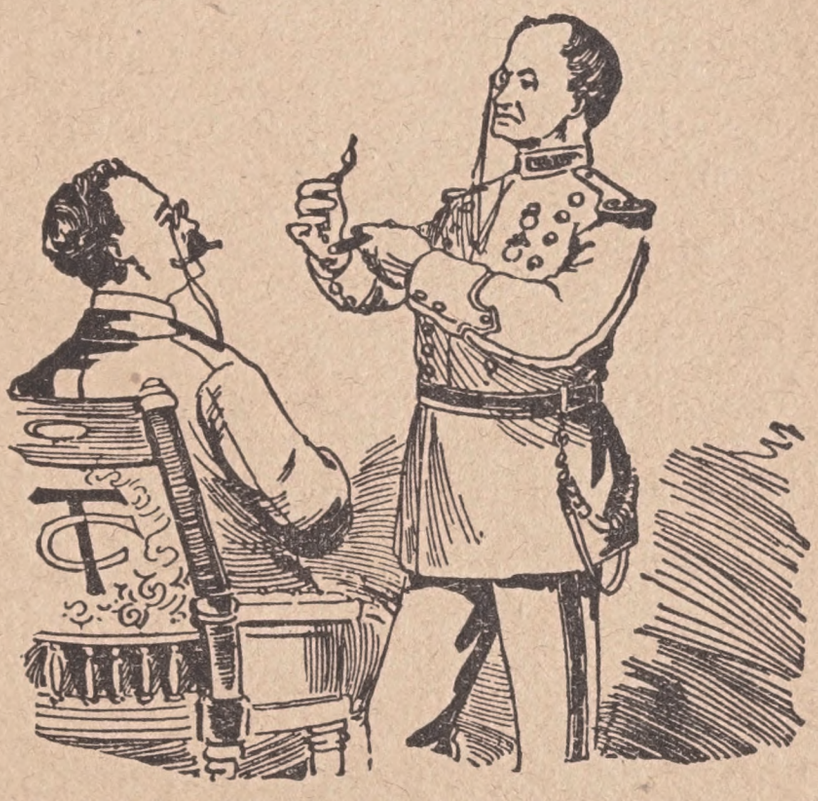
In appearance he was grave and dignified, tall and sparsely built, with not an ounce of superfluous fat. His age was five and fifty, but in his physical activity and brightness of eye looked fully ten years younger. His face was bronzed by the warmth of the Eastern sun and hardened by exposure, and down his right cheek was a deep seam made by the sword of a wild Rajput during the Mutiny, when he served with marked distinction. His eyes were a pale unfathomable blue, far searching distance. They were kindly looking, although cold, and a student of character would at once have decided that he was a man of his word—a man to be trusted.

Upon his arrival in the smoking-room he was warmly welcomed by those around him. returned their salutations with a courtesy, but politely declined to take a seat and join in the conversation.

"Of this particular subject I know nothing," he said; "I have but this day returned from the East, and where I have been newspapers have not reached me. You will pardon me, therefore, if I ask you to excuse me from

discussing the matter," and, as if anxious to avoid further questioning, he retired into an adjoining room.

"What an off-hand fellow that Mansfield is," said some one, when that gentleman had disappeared.



"MAD OR NOT, HE IS A REMARKABLY ABLE MAN," SAID A DRIED-UP INDIAN OFFICIAL.

"Yes, altogether unsociable," remarked another.

"But what can you expect of a man who has been living for years in the wilderness, with only his shadow for company?" added a third.

"A touch of madness somewhere, eh, doctor?" put in a ferret-faced barrister, significantly touching his forehead.

The doctor vouchsafed no reply.

"Mad or not," said a dried-up Indian official standing by, "he is a remarkably able man and knows more of the natives than the whole staff of the Indian Foreign Office put together. And if he has, as they say, sold himself to the devil, he has undoubtedly made a good bargain with His Satanic Majesty so far as this world is concerned, whatever may become of his soul in the next."

"If you knew Col. Mansfield as well as I do," remarked Dr. Harvey with considerable warmth, "you would know him to be one of the kindest-hearted fellows going, and a truer friend never existed."

No one appeared to question this direct testimony to the absent man's character, and Dr. Harvey shortly afterwards left the room. In the hall he met Col. Mansfield.

"What are you doing this evening?" he said. "Will you dine with me?"

"Thanks, no; I do not dine as you dine. I am almost a Hindoo in the matter of eating, and the fleshpots of Egypt have no attraction for me."

"Will you come home with me for an hour? I am still living in the old place in Harley

street. I am most anxious to have a quiet talk with you."

"With pleasure," said Mansfield, and a hansom being hailed they jumped in and drove to Harley street.

"Now my young friend," asked Mansfield, when they were in the doctor's study, "what can I do for you?"

"I want to speak with you about these horrible murders. You have heard about them, of course?"

"No!"

"Not heard of them? Why, I thought there was not a civilized country in the world where particulars of them had not been published," replied Harvey, in considerable astonishment.

"That may be," said his friend, "but I have not been in civilized countries. I only this morning arrived from Constantinople. I have been travelling in Asiatic Turkey for the past twelve months, and have been cut off from home news altogether."

"Then you are ignorant of the death of Gen. Ulverstone's daughter. She was foully murdered a week ago. She made the ninth victim, and, as in the other cases, no clue to the murderer has been discovered."

"No; I have not heard about it. It is true I saw some headlines on the newspapers' contents bill at the station concerning what was called the 'latest murder,' but as yet I have not read the papers. But what do you mean by 'as in the other cases?'"

Harvey then gave him particulars of the mysterious tragedies which had so completely baffled the vigilance of the London detective force.

"It is as you say," gravely remarked Mansfield when his companion had finished, "a very strange affair."

"Have you in all your travels ever heard of anything similar?"

"I have," was the grave rejoinder.

"Indeed!" said Harvey, in considerable surprise. "It has been asserted that in the annals of crime nothing similar is known."

"I was not referring to anything that had taken place in England; and much of what happens in the East finds no record in the West."

"And you think that an explanation of these murders may be found in something that has happened out in India?" said Harvey, eagerly.

"It is not impossible," replied Mansfield,

"Although I fail to see how the present murders can have any connection with what I am referring to. No, no," he muttered to himself after a pause, "it cannot be their work. You say," he added, looking intently at his companion, "that the victims bore a strong physical resemblance to each other?"

"Yes, a most remarkable likeness."

"And the death wound in each case was precisely the same?"

"Precisely."

"And the wound in each case was poisoned? Have you any idea of the nature of the poison used?"

"None whatever. It is a vegetable poison unknown in our pharmacopœia."

Col. Mansfield reflected a moment, and then he asked another question:

"Was death, in your opinion, instantaneous in each case?'

"Quite so, and the evidence goes to show that not so much as a sound escaped from the lips of the murdered women."

"Do you think they could have been chloroformed before being murdered?"

"No; there was no trace of chloroform."

"How do you account, then, for the absolute silence of the victims?"

"I cannot account for it; it is a matter that has puzzled me much."

"Do you think they were mesmerized?"

"I cannot say, But had they been mesmerized, they would, I presume, have been unconscious of the hand that struck the blow; whereas, judging from the expression of their

MANSFIELD STARTED SLIGHTLY AS HE LOOKED AT THE PHOTOGRAPH.

eyes, they were conscious of the fate that approached them."

"What was this expression?" asked Mansfield, with more eagerness than he had hitherto shown.

"One of intense horror."

"So!"

It was but an exclamation, but it was fraught with meaning.

"Does this say anything to you?" asked Harvey, eagerly.

"It says a good deal, but in India it would say a good deal more."

"In India—why in India?"

"Because it is only in India—if I am right in my deductions—that an adequate motive could be found for such apparently wanton murders. If I could have seen the corpse of the unfortunate young lady I could at once have told whether my present suspicions as to the motive of the crime were correct."

"I have a photograph of her taken after death; would that tell you anything?" Harvey produced a photo from his pocket and handed it to Mansfield.

The latter started slightly as he looked at it.

"My suspicions are confirmed," he said slowly. "But how can this be?" he added to himself; "why should they seek their victims here? It is very strange—very strange."

Then looking up at his companion he said:

"Miss Ulverstone appears to have been very like my goddaughter, Evelyn Hardcastle—that is, as I remember her; or is it my fancy?"

"Not at all; they were wonderfully alike in

voice, in appearance and in disposition. In fact, it was exceedingly difficult to tell one from the other, and even I at first was frequently puzzled to decide off-hand which was my fiancée. See, here is Evelyn," and he opened a locket dangling from his watch-chain. "The likeness is very remarkable, isn't it?"

"It is remarkable, and it may be fatal," was the solemn reply.

"Fatal, Mansfield! Good God, what do you mean?" said the young man greatly alarmed.

"Do not alarm yourself. I may be wrong in my conjecture, and—"

"I see what you mean," replied Harvey, hoarsely; you think she—my darling—may be the next victim. You believe so? You cannot deny it," and in the intensity of his emotion he gripped his companion tightly by the arm.

"I will not deceive you," replied Mansfield, sympathetically. She—if my theory is correct—may be in danger. Sooner or later the hand that has taken the lives of the others will possibly make the attempt on her life. But"—and his eyes lit up with a strange light—"this time they will be baffled of their prey. I will save her," he added to himself, "if it costs me my life."

CHAPTER IV.

EVELYN Hardcastle, Fred Harvey's fiancée, was a beautiful girl. She was very fair, with a wealth of golden hair; her eyes were a deep blue and of the kind a poet calls soulful, and she was exquisitely formed. But her charms did not lie so much in regularity of facial outline and perfection of form as in the sweetness of her disposition and graceful bearing.

Her murdered friend had, as has been stated, closely resembled her, especially in the expresssion of the eyes. No one who knew them failed to notice the extraordinary resemblance. Their dispositions, too, were to all outward appearance precisely alike,t he wish of one invariably being the wish of the other. From early childhood they had been friends, and it was their boast that in all the years they had known each other they had not once quarrelled.

The learned Theosophist stated on one occasion that there was undoubtedly an affinity—whatever that might mean—between them, and that their souls as well as their lives were bound together in indestructible bonds. They were as the love-birds, he said, made for each

other while in life; and as the love-bird, if robbed of its mate, pines and dies, so would it be impossible for one to survive the other. But Geraldine Ulverstone had been slain, and Evelyn Hardcastle, in spite of the alleged affinity, did not die. She was, as a matter of course, terribly upset, and the shock to her system caused considerable anxiety, but her love for Fred Harvey sustained her. Had she had no lover to lavish her affections upon, her sympathetic heart might have broken at the loss of her friend.

For more than a fortnight after the inquest she was confined to her room, but at length she was well enough to come downstairs and receive a few of her personal friends.

It was the eve of her birthday.

Several friends had called during the afternoon, but they had all gone, and she and her fiancée were alone together.

"Now, Fred, we are all alone; tell me what ails you. Are you ill, dearest?" she said, with a shade of anxiety upon her face.

"No, darling," he answered somewhat wearily; "I am quite well."

"Why, then, are you so sad and heavy, for, you dear old fellow, you are as dull as—well, I don't know what. A nice, cheerful companion

for an invalid," she added banteringly. "Come, smile; no, smile—that's it."

Harvey tried to smile, but it was like a November sun endeavoring to shine through a London fog.

A GLIMPSE OF EVELYN HARDCASTLE.

"You call that a smile, do you?" and she held up her finger reprovingly. "There must be something," she continued; "what is it now? You mustn't have secrets from me—indeed you mustn't."

"I have no secrets, my darling." He said this with an attempt at a laugh, but it was a

nervous meaningless laugh, and the sternness of his face did not relax.

"Then why are you so glum, Fred? It isn't at all like you. Aren't you pleased with me? I feel almost inclined to cry; and I was so happy to think you were coming to-day." She lowered her eyes which became dim with tears.

"This will not do, dearest. Look up, Evie mine," and he pressed her hands passionately in his. "See, darling, I am smilling," and the poor fellow looked into the eyes that were turned to him. But they were tears that softened his eyes, not smiles.

"You don't call that smiling! Why, Fred, you are crying," she replied, stroking his head.

"Yes, dear, out of sympathy for you." He bit his tongue after he had said the words, but they were spoken and could not be recalled. Luckily she did not understand his meaning.

"Out of sympathy for me, dear; how so? Am I not quite well now? You said yourself that I should soon be all right—and you are a doctor."

"Yes, dear," he replied, "I know that. I dare say I am very foolish; but I do love you so."

He was thinking of the fate that might be

awaiting her. To-morrow was her birthday, and to-morrow she might be lying dead. He tried to dismiss the thought from his mind. "Why should she be murdered—she who has not a single enemy in the world?" argued Hope. "But then," replied Fear, "What had Geraldine Ulverstone done? Why was she chosen as a victim? If she was murdered, why should your darling escape?"

It was an anxious time for him, and the anxiety laid its impress upon his spirits.

Evelyn accepted Fred's explanation, although she was convinced there was something more to be explained, but she kept her doubts to herself and said nothing more.

The entrance of her father, a somewhat care-worn-looking man of sixty (Evelyn had no mother) followed by Col. Mansfield, moreover, cut short all further conversation.

Evelyn sprang up with a cry of delight as she saw her godfather.

"Well, my little one; but this I must call you no longer, for you have become a woman since I last saw you," said Mansfield, taking both her hands in his and kissing her on her forehead.

"You may call me what you like, Uncle Lal"—with her he was always Uncle Lal, al-

though they were in no way related. "But what a long time it is since we last saw you; where have you been all these years?"

"That, my dear, would take weeks to tell: but I hope before I leave again to have time to tell you all that has happened since we last met."

"Before you leave again? You mustn't be talking about leaving. Why, you have only just come, and this is the first time I have seen you for five years."

"I hope to be able to stay till the end of the year. In such case, with your permission, I shall see you often; but, to be frank with you, I may have to leave at any moment—perhaps even to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said Fred and Evelyn in one breath, and the expression on the young man's face was one of the greatest alarm. He had convinced himself that the only chance of his darling's safety lay in the protection of Col. Mansfield; and now he, who might be able to save her, was going away.

"Yes, it may be to-morrow that I shall have to depart."

"And where to?" asked Evelyn.

"To India."

A suppressed groan escaped from Harvey's

tightly compressed lips. There was, then, no hope of his assistance.

"You spend all your time out there now, Mansfield," said Mr. Hardcastle. "I hope you find it pays."

"All my interests are centred in the East," was the equivocal reply.

"I HAVE NO SECRETS, MY DARLING," HE SAID.

"When is your book coming out, Uncle Lal?" said Evelyn; "one hears so much about it, and I am terribly anxious to see it."

"Not just yet, dear; not till I am dead, maybe."

"Don't talk of dying, Uncle Lal; you must

never die," replied Evelyn, with a reproachful glance.

"Well, don't let us talk about the book, then, but about yourself, dear. To-morrow is your birthday, is it not?"

"Yes, to-morrow I am twenty-one; only fancy, to-morrow I am of age, and then I shall commence the down grade, according to a woman's idea about age. But I don't feel at all old. Do I look old, Uncle Lal? You at least will tell me the truth. Fred and father are such dreadful flatterers."

She turned her sweet face to his with a bewitching roguery in her expressive eyes.

"Old, dear? If all women looked as fresh and young at one and twenty! So your father and this thrice happy young man flatter you, do they? They probably only speak half the truth," replied her godfather, gallantly. "Why, Harvey, what makes you look so glum?" he said, turning to the young doctor, who, at the reference to his fiancée's birthday, had perceptibly shuddered; for was it not on her twenty-first birthday, exactly a month ago, that Geraldine Ulverstone had been murdered; and what might not be the fate on the morrow of the girl he loved best on earth?

Harvey made some haphazard answer, and

Mansfield, seeing how the land lay, did not again refer to the matter.

"Now, my little goddaughter, I must say good-day," said Mansfield after a while, "and I hope it will not be good-by. But I cannot at this moment tell where to-morrow will find me. I have therefore brought with me a little birth-day gift, which I might not be able to bring to-morrow, and I prefer your receiving it from my own hands."

He took from his pocket a packet and opened it. It contained a gold chain curiously fashioned, to which was attached a locket. The locket was heart-shaped, and in the centre was a diamond, shaped like the sun, its scintillations in the light looking like sun-rays.

"What a beautiful present, and what a lovely diamond," said Evelyn, enthusiastically, as she took the gift from Mansfield's hand. "It con-contains a lock of hair; how white it is and how strangely woven, and what do these curious signs mean?" she added, pointing to the polished surface of the heart. "It must be very old."

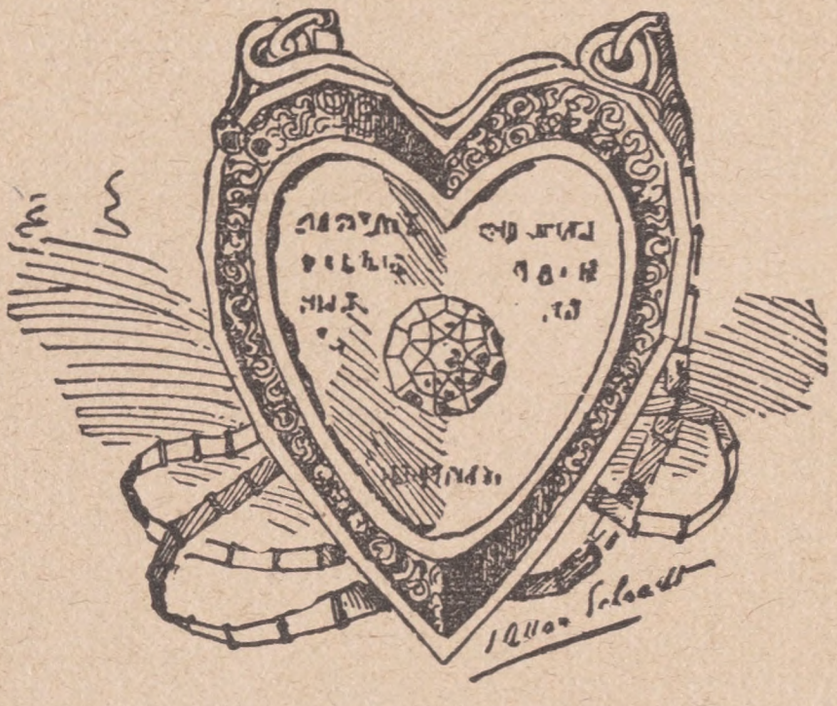
"It is very old, dear—older than any living man; older, in fact, than many nations," replied Mansfield gravely.

"How good of you to give me so curious

and beautiful a present! But, Uncle Lal, you haven't told me what these hieroglyphics mean?"

"They mean, dear," he replied, spelling out the signs: "'I am the shield of the heart that I cover.'"

"What a beautiful sentiment! I really ought



IT WAS A CURIOUS PIECE OF HANDIWORK.

to wear it over my heart after that," she answered gayly.

"Yes, dear; that is just what I was going to ask you to do, to wear it always, sleeping or waking. You promise to do this?" He asked the question with great earnestness.

"Of course, Uncle Lal, I will do so if you wish it."

"I do wish it," he replied simply.

Then, taking his present from her, he put the chain round her neck, with the locket covering her beating heart, muttering something to himself as he did so.

"What were you saying to yourself, Uncle Lal? It sounded like some mystic rite," said Evelyn, looking at him with curious eyes.

"I was simply saying I hoped it would bring you good luck," he replied somewhat evasively; "presents given beforehand are said to be unlucky, you know, and I want this to be a talisman of good fortune. And now, dear, I must be going. You won't begrudge me a farewell kiss, I hope?"

He took her fair face in his hands and pressed a burning kiss upon her forehead.

"How much you are like your mother—there, good-by," he said; and as he turned away tears were in his eyes. Evelyn never forgot his farewell look or his farewell words. In another moment he was gone.

"Are you really going away to-morrow?" said Harvey, nervously, as he saw his friend to the door.

"I cannot at this moment say; it is possible—nay, it is probable; but to-night will decide everything."

"I had hoped," replied the young man,

mournfully, "that you would have stayed over to-morrow, for I have—I can't tell you why—so much faith in your power to avert any danger that may threaten her. But tell me, standing here with your hand in mine, if you think she is in any danger."

"TO-NIGHT I SHALL KNOW ALL."

"At this moment I cannot tell you what may happen. To-night I shall know all. Call on me to-morrow."

"But before the sun rises she may—if the assassin has selected her as his next victim—be dead," replied Harvey, in an anguish of despair.

"Nay, my friend, no harm can come to her."

"Are you certain of this?"

"As certain as there is a life beyond the grave—that is, if she fails not to wear the locket next her heart."

CHAPTER V.

It was midnight—midnight in the heart of London. Big Ben was just striking the hour, and its sonorous notes were being wafted across the dark running Thames, when Col. Mansfield entered his chambers in the Temple.

He struck a light on entering and seated himself in an armchair, burying his face in his hands as if in deep thought. For several minutes he sat thus without moving; then he raised his head. Upon his face was an expression of marked determination, and a strange, far-off look was in his eyes.

"For her sake I have done it; for her sake," he muttered to himself. He opened a cabinet close at hand and took from it a miniature. It was the portrait of a beautiful girl. He looked at it fondly and kissed it several times.

"How very like her daughter. Evie has her eyes, her look, her soul," he said gazing at the portrait with rapt attention.

"For your sake I will brave all," he continued. "In life we have been separated, in death we should be united. In death, which is the life beyond, our souls would come together. So be it."

He returned the miniature to the cabinet.

"The night has waned, the hour for putting the matter to the test has arrived," he said, looking out of his window upon the silent garden below,

With this he entered his bedroom.

"In about ten minutes he returned dressed in a long, flowing robe of white. His appearance was entirely altered, and he looked more like the figure of a Persian magi than an English officer.

In his hand he carried a scroll and an ebony rod, carved with numerous symbols. He stood in the centre of the room, where he lifted up his eyes as if in prayer, although no words escaped his lips. Then he blew out the light, but he was not in darkness, for a most remarkable thing happened; the scroll when opened appeared to be illuminated with some luminous substance, and as he held it up to read, the light therefrom shone upon his face.

Slowly and impressively he read in a strange tongue from the pages he held.

Then, taking the rod in his right hand and drawing a circle round him where he stood, he commenced the following incantation :

"Masters, hear me.

"Brothers, hear me.

"I, who have drunk of the water of purity and have eaten of the fruit of eternity ; I, who am even as thou art need thy guidance.

"Deny it me not, my master ; deny it me not, my brothers.

"By the sign of our brotherhood I adjure ye."

He bared his breast and exposed the sign of a heart in the centre of which was a blazing sun punctured, and upon the stillness came the answer in solemn tones :

"By the sign of thy brotherhood, what thou askest shall be answered, what thou wishest shall be done."

No one was visible, and the voice suddenly ceased.

"Master, I thank thee," said Mansfield, fervently, bowing low before him. Then he continued :

"O Master !

"O Brothers !

"To whom everything is known, be it of evil or be it of good : who can divine our in-

nermost thoughts and interpret all our motives, be we where we may, lift, I pray ye, the veil that is now before my eyes.

"A Thing of Evil is on the path of blood, threatening, may be, the life of one who is dear unto me.

THE FIGURE POINTED TO A MYSTIC SIGN PUNCTURED ON HIS BREAST.

"Her I would defend—ay, even unto the sacrifice of my own life.

"Hear me, then, O Masters!

"Hear me, then, O Brothers!

"Send this shade of Darkness unto me so that I may see his face and know whom it is that threatens."

"It shall be as thou wishest, brothers!" came the reply in the same solemn tones as the first.

Mansfield bowed low again.

"Masters, I thank thee.

"Brothers. I thank thee," he said.

Then waving his stick three times he called out in a loud voice:

"Come forth thou slave of Evil!

"Come forth thou shade of Darkness!

"Stand before me, thou whose hand is red with the blood of the innocent, so that I may know thy purpose and stay thy hand.

"By the Power of Light and the Will of the One Master I command thee."

The room grew suddenly darker, and a thick, fog-like atmosphere arose around Mansfield, whose face and form, however, lit up by the magic scroll, stood out clear and distinct.

Mansfield's words echoed strangely in the room, and they had barely ceased when another voice was heard. It was harsh and gutteral, and this was what it said:

"What does the Brotherhood of Light wish of the Slave of Darkness?

"As the power of Light commands, so do I obey.

"Behold, oh Brother of Light I stand before thee. What is thy wish?"

Out of the foul, damp atmosphere the figure of a man seemed to form itself, and, the room growing suddenly lighter, it stood revealed, facing Mansfield. The face of the man was hard and stone-like, the lips were wreathed with a malevolent smile, while the expression of his eyes was horrible in the extreme. In his right hand the man held a dagger shaped like a serpent.

"What, you?" said Mansfield, drawing afresh the circle with his rod.

"Yes, I," replied the form, opening his close-fitting tunic of black and exultantly pointing to a mystic sign punctured on his breast. It was that of a crescent, over which trailed a loathsome serpent, black as night, and with pale, dilated eyes.

Mansfield shuddered as he saw it, and he read some words from the scroll he held.

When he looked up again he was alone. The form had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

It was some hours past midnight. A great silence was over the earth. Not a sound was heard in the streets, not even the footsteps of the policemen on beat. Evelyn Hardcastle lay in bed, sleepless and restless. Once she had closed her eyes and had dreamed a horrible dream.

Dark figures with evil eyes surrounded her. They sought to clutch her and tear her limb from limb. Then came the lithe form of a man with a dagger in his hand. His face was dark, but his eyes were like coals of fire. He approached her bed and muttered some incantation over her.

She could neither move nor cry out. All power of resistance was subdued in her. Nearer came the man, and then he raised his dagger, formed like a serpent with pale, flashing eyes, and held it over her.

Down it came, and a pain like a thrust of a red-hot iron smote her in the region of the heart.

She awoke with a start, bathed in perspiration.

"How horrible! How horrible!" she said, looking tremblingly around the room.

She was not a superstitious girl, but the circumstances seriously impressed her.

What if it should be a warning of her approaching end?

LYING ON THE DOORSTEP WAS THE FORM OF A MAN.

She remembered that the night before Geraldine Ulverstone was murdered her friend had had a somewhat similar dream.

Could it be that she was to die in a like manner.

"Oh! Fred, Fred, what will happen to you if I am killed?"

Her first thoughts were of her lover.

"And, father, dear, you would be so lonely if I were dead, you have no one but me since poor mother died. And dear Uncle Lal; he would miss me too.

"And I am so young to die. Oh, Father in heaven, have mercy on me. For their sakes protect me this night."

She prayed long and fervently, and at the conclusion was considerahly calmed.

Once she thought she heard mocking voices; and the flapping of the window blind made her heart leap with fear.

She tried to sleep, but her thoughts were too active.

Presently she arose and looked at her watch. It was close upon 5 o'clock.

"I was born at 5 they tell me, so now I am twenty-one. To-day, too, the new moon is born."

She went to the window and looked out.

Below her, lying on the doorstep, was the form of a man. It was Harvey, who had fallen asleep on his watch. She did not see him, and she had no idea that her faithful lover had come to keep watch and guard over her.

All was still without. The stars were paling

to extinction and the red flush of morn was in the skies.

"Everything seems born afresh to-day," she said, looking towards the east, where the sun was chasing away the night clouds.

As she stood there a shadow fell across the window.

It was that of a hand holding a dagger.

"Merciful God, what's that?" she shrieked, drawing back.

The hand was followed by the form of a man.

The face, the form were those of the fiend of her dream.

She tried to scream, but her tongue clove to her mouth.

She attempted to move, but her limbs refused to act. She was as one under the fascination of a snake.

And nearer and nearer came the dread form with the glittering, baneful eyes.

Oh, the horror of those eyes!

The hand was raised, and the point of the dagger, which seemed to writhe like a live snake in its grasp, was pressing upon her heart.

The form of the fiend as it bent over her looked like a distorted shadow—like the outcome of a hallucination. The dagger alone appeared real and substantial.

As the point was level with her breast, the terror-stricken girl remembered Mansfield's words, and, by a superhuman effort, she clutched at the chain around her neck and pressed the locket upon her heart.

Then she was struck. She felt the dagger glide off the locket.

A yell of baffled rage, of agonized despair rang in her ears.

The room swam round her, the awful figure vanished, she remembered no more. With a shriek she fell fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER VII.

THE news of the attempt on Miss Hardcastle's life speedily became known, and created a profound sensation. The newspapers issued special editions, and placards bearing the following headlines were carried about by yelling newsboys:

THE MYSTERIOUS MURDERS!
AN ATTEMPT!!
THE WOULD-BE VICTIM SAVED BY A CHARM!!!

The most extraordinary rumors were cur-

rent. The murderer, it was said, was now known, and his arrest would only be a question of hours, One paper stated that the murderer, the keeper of an antiquity shop, had actually been arrested, and that Miss Hardcastle had identified a dagger in his possession as the one that had been aimed at her heart. But these statements were flatly contradicted in subsequent editions, and as the day wore on, the police were, it was asserted, without a clue.

Miss Hardcastle was too ill to be seen by any one, and the reporters had to content themselves with interviewing her father and Dr. Harvey.

Dr. Harvey stated that impelled by some unaccountable premonition, he had decided to keep guard outside his fiancée's house, believing, as he did, that her life was in danger. He added that he must have fallen asleep, for he was suddenly aroused by a piercing shriek coming from Miss Hardcastle's room.

Fearing the worst, he rushed to the house-bell and rang it, at the same time crying loudly for help. The house was speedily aroused, and by the time the door was opened two policemen had appeared on the scene. One accompanied him inside the house, while the other went around to the back. The back door,

like the front, was fastened inside. All the windows, too, were shut and latched, and the assassin could not have possibly left the house.

Miss Hardcastle was found lying in her dressing-gown on the floor in a dead faint. She was, however, uninjured.

HARVEY KNOCKED AT MANSFIELD'S DOOR.

Of the murderer there was no trace. The most rigorous search was made everywhere, even unto the chimneys, but without avail. He certainly had not left by either the windows or the doors, and he was not in the house. Could the assassin be among the servants?

They were placed under arrest, pending the return of consciousness of their young mistress.

When she came to it was a strange story that she told, so strange, in fact, that every one thought her laboring under a hallucination; and were it not for the deep scratch on the locket made by the dagger as evidence of the attempt, the whole affair would have been put down as a disordered creation of the brain.

The medical evidence went to show that the dagger scratch was in all probability made by the very weapon used in connection with the previous murders, and that it was beyond question that the young lady owed her safety to the locket she wore round her neck.

Had it not been for Col. Mansfield's souvenir a tenth victim would have been added to the list.

"What was the virtue of this talisman?" asked the writers of the papers.

"How did Col. Mansfield know the attempt would be made?" For he must have known, they argued, otherwise he would not have made the gift and have given the solemn instructions he did as to the wearing of it.

"Couldn't Col. Mansfield throw some light upon the mystery? Couldn't he give a clue to the discovery of the murderer?

"We wait Col. Mansfield's explanation."

Dr. Harvey, as soon as he had assured himself of Evelyn's safety and the hopelessness of finding the assassin in the house or grounds, had driven to Col. Mansfield's chambers in the Temple. It was close upon 10 o'clock when he arrived there, and he felt sure of finding his friend at home. But to his disappointment the caretaker told him she believed he was out.

"When did he go out?" asked Harvey.

"I don't know, sir," was the curt reply. "He was out when I knocked at his door—at least he didn't answer; but when he went out, sir, I don't know."

"Didn't he leave any message for me?"

"None as I know of, sir, shall I go and see?"

"Thanks; I will go myself."

Harvey mounted the stairs and knocked at his friend's door. There was no answer. He entered the room. Mansfield was not there. His things were lying about, so he evidently intended to return.

On the table, propped against the inkstand, was a bulky packet. It at once attracted Harvey's attention.

It was addressed as follows:

To F. Harvey, Esq., M. D.:
Not to be opened until the
20th of the present month.
Dated 6th September, 18—.

So he was gone. His departure hinted at the night before had actually taken place.

"But if he had gone to India, why had he left his wardrobe and travelling things behind him," thought the young doctor. "But perhaps he has altered his mind," he concluded, "and has simply gone into the country for a few days."

He knew him to be a man of curious habits and not one to be judged by ordinary rules, and his sudden departure did not particularly surprise him.

It was, however, he said to himself, most unfortunate that he should be away at a time when his services might be of the greatest use. But there was no help for it; he was gone, and his reasons for going were probably contained in the packet he had left behind—a packet which, according to the instructions written thereon, was not to be opened for another fortnight. In the meantime the assassin, who, with Col. Mansfield's help, might be brought to justice, would probably escape.

Harvey looked about the sitting-room for some further signs of his absent friend.

The fire grate was strewn with torn and burnt pieces of paper.

Drawn on the carpet was a black ring, as if made with a hot iron.

PROPPED AGAINST THE INKSTAND WAS A BULKY PACKET.

"Queer idea, to burn one's carpets in this fashion," thought Harvey; "some chemical experiment, I suppose," he added, stepping inside the ring.

"What is that?" said the young man, looking hastily around. He thought he heard a sigh.

"I wonder if there is anybody in the next room? Perhaps Mansfield's not up yet, although he is a deuce of an early riser." He went, as he said this, to his friend's bedroom and knocked.

The echo of the knock was the only answer he received.

CHAPTER VIII.

He tried the handle; the door was fastened. "Are you in, Mansfield?" he called out, rattling the door-handle.

There was no reply.

"I suppose he doesn't want anybody to meddle with his things while he is away," thought the young man, "and so locked up his room before going." Then something prompted him to strike a light and look through the keyhole. The door was fastened from the inside and the key was still in the lock.

"Good God! can anything have happened to him?" exclaimed Harvey. "It must have been his sigh I heard: perhaps he is lying in there dying.

"Mansfield, Mansfield, answer me, for

heaven's sake, if you are in there," shouted the young man.

But all was silent as the grave in that closed room.

"The door must be opened and the worst known," said Harvey, ringing the bell.

The housekeeper, after some moments of tantalizing delay, appeared in answer to the summons.

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Ring, woman? Why every one in the whole place must have heard me."

"And what do you please to want, sir?"

"I want this door opened; I believe my friend to be in there."

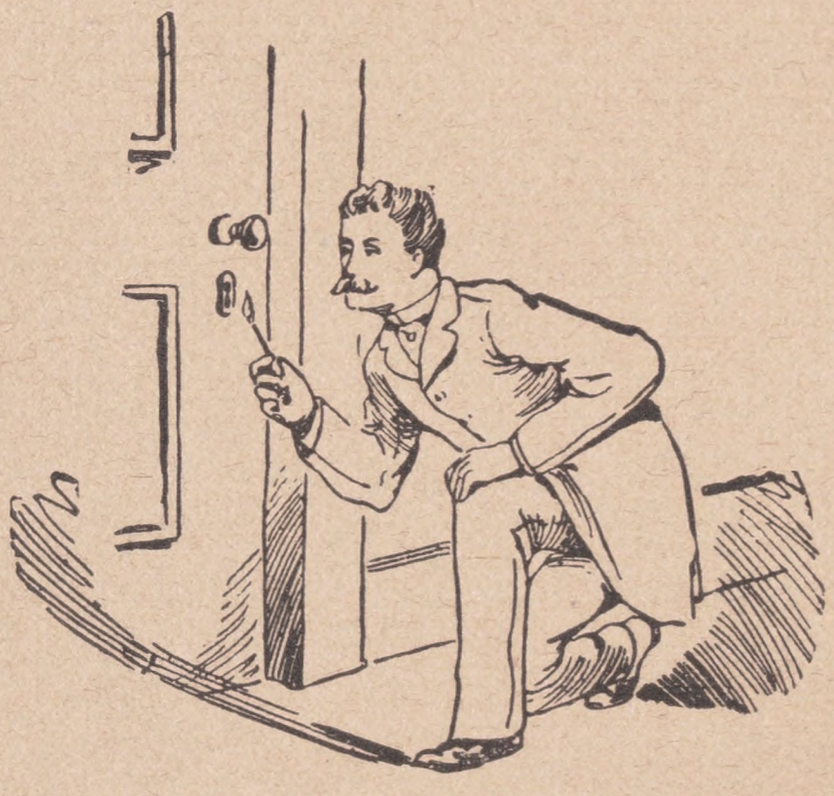
"Goodness me, sir; what makes you think that? 'E ain't inside or 'e'd 've 'eard me knock when I brought 'is 'ot water hup. 'E's a dredful hearly riser is the Colonel. When I knocks, sir, there his few as can't 'ear me," and the woman gave a loud rat-a-tat-tat at the door.

"There, you see, sir, 'e ain't in there; I told you so."

"But the door is locked from the inside and and the key is in the lock," explained Harvey.

"His it? Well, that's a rum go," replied the housekeeper, with a curious look on her not overclean face. "Doors, sir, can't lock

theirselves, especially from the hinside," she added, with a sagacious nod, "and you may depend upon it, sir, that the Colonel is hinside after all. Now, if the door 'd bin locked from the houtside, even if the key 'adn't bin in the lock, I should 've said as 'ow the Colonel was hout and not hin; but seeing as 'ow"——



HE STRUCK A LIGHT AND LOOKED THROUGH THE KEYHOLE.

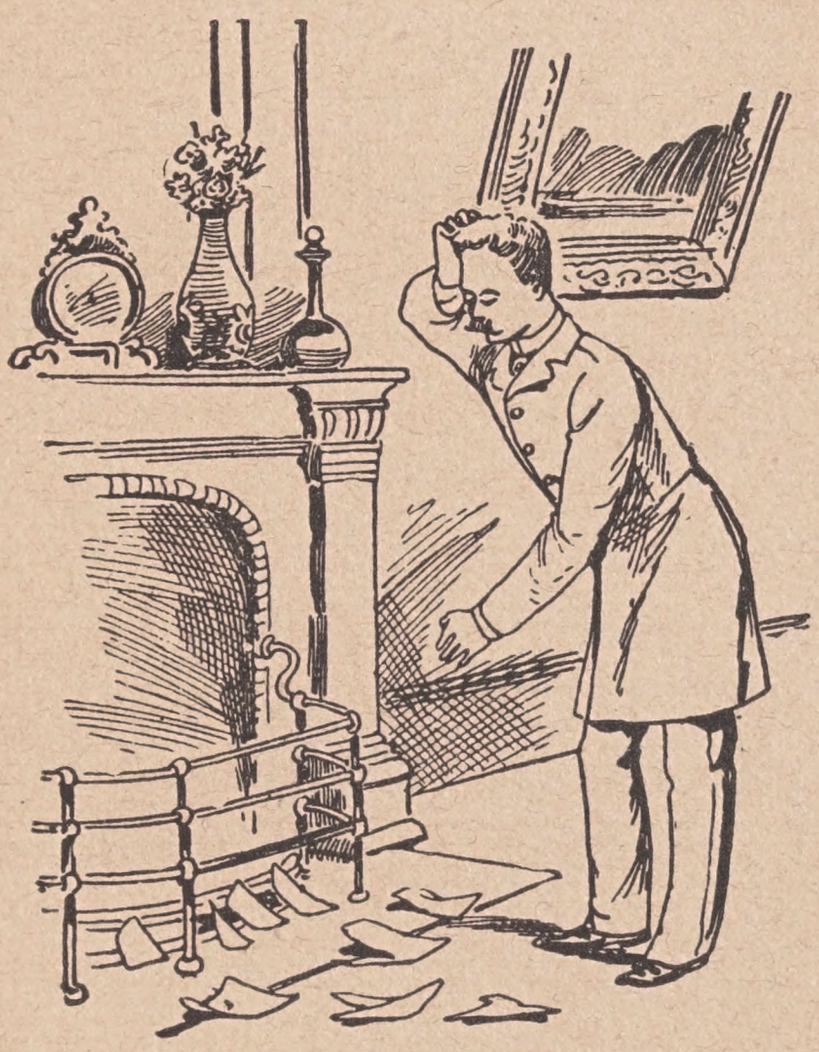
Harvey cut her short and requested her to get something with which to force the door.

"Somethin' to force the door with! Bless you, sir, it don't want much forcing. These doors is that rotten and shaky that I expects every puff of wind to blow 'em horf their

'inges. A little shove with your shoulder, sir, and it'll bust hopen at once."

Harvey applied his shoulder to the door, and in a little while it gave way.

No sound came from the inner room as the door swung back. "Was Mansfield there,



THE FIREPLACE WAS STREWN WITH CHARRED PAPER.

after all? If so, was he alive or dead?" were the thoughts that coursed through the young man's mind as he entered the room.

For his answer he saw his friend lying on the bed, still and rigid as if in death. A cry es-

caped his lips, which was taken up by the housekeeper with vigor.

"Poor gentleman, 'e's dead, sure enough," she said. "Only last night as hever was I 'eard the death-watch tick. I knew as 'ow it wasn't tickin' for nothink, but I didn't think it was meant for the poor Colonel. No, that I didn't," and the good woman wiped away a tear with a corner of her apron. "But only fancy, sir, of 'im a puttin' on 'is shroud before dyin'."

She pointed to the motionless form of Mansfield, which was covered with the long, white robe he had worn while evoking the Slave of Darkness.

By this time Harvey was by his friend's bedside. He lifted the left arm; it was stiff as if in death. He put his ear to his heart; there was no sign of life. He tried to lift the eyelids, but they were set fast. Yet the young doctor did not believe his friend to be dead. There was all the outward appearance of death, but, all the same, the body looked more like that of one in whom life was suspended than one in whom life was extinct.

Something seemed to tell him that his friend, although absolutely insensible to all around him, was not actually dead, but in a deep trance.

As he was examining the body his eyes

alighted on a note pinned to the breast of the long white robe.

Harvey unfastened it and read its contents, which ran as follows:

I am not dead, but am merely sleeping. Do not move me or disturb me in any way. The packet I have left in the next room addressed to my friend Dr. Harvey will explain everything. I place myself in Dr. Harvey's charge, and I wish him to take possession of the keys of my room.

Sept. 6, 18—. LIONEL MANSFIELD.

"That packet; I wonder what it contains?" thought Harvey. "There is something strange about the whole thing; the mystery increases instead of diminishing, and this," taking the bulky envelope out of his pocket, "is apparently the key to it."

He long to tear open the cover and read its contents then and there, but his friend's instructions were imperative and he restrained himself.

"Not to be opened till the 20th of September," he muttered to himself. "Well, old fellow, your wishes shall be strictly carried out."

The floor and fireplace, as in the outer room, was strewn with curious pieces of burned paper.

After giving instructions for some one to sit

by Mansfield's bedside while he was absent, Harvey took his departure.

CHAPTER IX.

On the morning of Sept. 7, the day following the attempt on Miss Hardcastle's life, an extraordinary discovery was made.

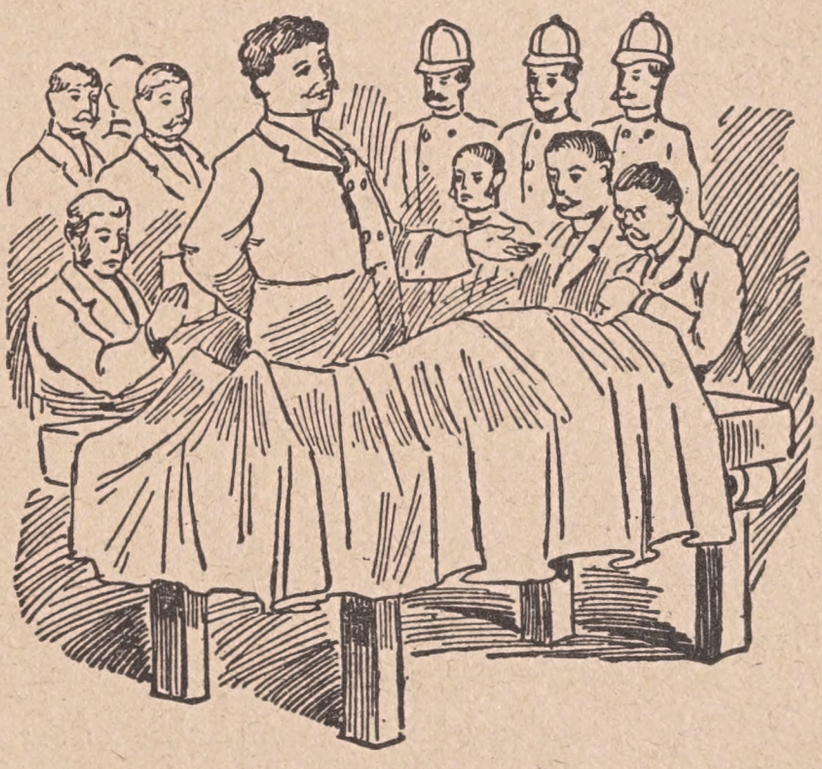
Râm Dass, a young Hindoo, studying for the the bar, living at 523 Colville street, Bayswater, was found dead in his room, under circumstances which, according to the newspapers, gave rise to the gravest suspicions of foul play.

The police were most reticent about the matter, and the landlady of the house where the young man lodged refused to be interviewed.

The public had therefore to content themselves with the general surmises contained in the newspapers; and the inquest was accordingly awaited with great excitement, for somehow or other it had got abroad that the death of the Hindoo was connected with the recent mysterious tragedies—in fact, that a dagger, apparently the one with which the previous murders had been committed, was found stuck through his heart.

Meanwhile the state of Col. Mansfield attracted considerable attention, and was the subject of much discussion in the press.

Some of the most eminent physiologists had visited Mansfield and, contrary to the sleeping man's express instructions, tried a variety of experiments upon him, but without arousing



A DISCUSSION AFTER THE INQUEST ON THE HINDOO.

the slightest sign of animation. They were convinced that life was not extinct, but not one of the scientists had in his experience ever come across a case of so deep a trance.

It was decided that Mansfield should remain where he was, as it was feared that removal might snap the slender thread which bound him to life. Dr. Harvey undertook the charge of his

friend, and had him carefully looked after; but from sunrise to sunset the condition of the sleeeper was precisely the same, and the young doctor watched in vain for the slightest sign of returning vitality.

In the old days such a subject would have been buried alive.

All manner of contradictory rumors were set afloat concerning Mansfield, some of which sought to connect him in some unaccountable way with the dead Hindoo.

It was strange, it was argued, that Mansfield, who apparently alone knew that Miss Hardcastle was to be the next person attacked, should at the very time when his evidence might be of the greatest service be lying senseless in a trance. Besides, what was the meaning of putting on that curious-fashioned white dress? These and other perplexing questions were asked over and over again without receiving a solution, and the public waited impatiently for the time when the sleeping man should wake from his trance. Some mystically inclined people, who had dabbled in Theosophy, threw out vague hints that Mansfield was indirectly if not directly implicated in the recent murders. He, they hinted, was a member of a band of modern Thugs, whose mission it was to slaugh-

ter certain women of a peculiar affinity in order to obtain possession of their souls. But to what purpose the said souls were to be applied they omitted to state.

Râm Dass, they argued, was probably aware of Mansfield's connection with this mysterious body and had been slain by the Colonel's magic or had been goaded to commit suicide in order that he might not give evidence against him.

"But," replied those to whom this incredulous story was related, "it is proved beyond doubt that Col. Mansfield only returned to England on the morning of the 10th of August, and it is therefore entirely out of the question that he could have a hand in the previous murders."

"That may be," said the knowing ones; "but you may depend upon it that he had something to do with the attempt at Miss Hardcastle's life."

"How so?"

"Why, he took every precaution to save the the young lady's life; and if it had not been for the charm he placed round her neck she would undoubtedly have been killed like the rest. Murderers do not, as a rule, first protect those whom they have decided to slay."

"Quite so. In ordinary cases this would

hold good, but I think this is not an ordinary case. If our deductions are correct, Mansfield was deputed by the chief of the council of the band to which he belongs to slay Miss Hardcastle. He was chosen on account of his friendship with the family and the easiness of his access to her. But his heart misgave him at the last moment, and he gave her the locket which was to guard her against the threatening danger, the task allotted to him being handed over to some one else."

"But why this compunction on his part? If the man is, as you intimate, a member of a gang scarcely human in their thirst for blood, why should he elect to spare this particular young lady?"

"There's the rub," replied the wiseacres. "Miss Hardcastle is Mansfield daughter. Years ago Mansfield was in love with her mother. He was poor and went to India and she married—she was forced by her parents into the marriage it was said at the time—young Hardcastle. Now Evelyn Hardcastle is the very image of the Evelyn Caruthers Mansfield was in love with. Her marriage with Hardcastle very nearly broke his heart, we believe, and he has remained true to his first love through life. This will probably account for

his unwillingness to take the life of the daughter of the woman he loved."

This theory was not, however, generally accepted. Col. Mansfield was known to be a humane man and one not at all likely to associate himself with a band of murderers. Besides, it was argued, what object was there to be gained by such an alliance?

To which his detractors would reply that, having joined the Brotherhood, he was bound, under penalty of death, to carry out any mission, no matter how murderous, that might be intrusted to him. It was further alleged that his Brotherhood was far more exciting than the Nihilists, and that no one who had broken his vow had been known to escape their vengeance.

"But what proof have you that such a Brotherhood exists? And if it does exist, where are its headquarters?" some people would ask.

"Of the existence of such a Brotherhood there is no question," would reply those who professed to know all about it, "and its headquarters are somewhere in India, where it is not exactly known.

"But, granting this, what proof have you

that Col. Mansfield belongs or has ever belonged to such a secret society ?"

This direct question was not so easy to answer, and refuge was taken in general assertions.

HE HAD A SWORD-CUT DOWN HIS CHEEK.

It was well known in India, it was said, that there was something uncanny about Mansfield ; that he periodically disappeared, no one knew where or how, and that he was quite an adept in the art of magic.

It was not the first time, moreover, that he had been in a trance, which state, it was asserted, he could assume at will. Indeed, was there not a brother officer of his who swore that he had on one occasion actually seen the spiritual double of the Colonel, accompanied by other spectral forms, enter the very room where his (Mansfield's) body lay stiff and motionless on a rug? It was an undoubted fact that the officer in question was perfectly sober at the time, and the reverse of superstitious.

CHAPTER X.

THESE statements were designated by the sceptical as old women's stories, and they refused to condemn Mansfield upon such flimsy evidence.

The police attached no importance to the various rumors concerning Mansfield, who lay in his room utterly oblivious of what was being said concerning him.

The inquest upon the body of the Hindoo, Râm Dass, was held in due course.

The landlady of the house where he lodged, a widow, Mrs. Parker by name, gave evidence as to the finding of the body.

The young man had, she said, lodged with her since the beginning of the year. He was a very quiet, studious person, giving little trouble.

Asked if the deceased had many visitors, she replied that no one, with the exception of a gentleman who had called on the afternoon of the 5th, had visited him the whole time he had stayed with her.

She described the visitor as a tall, dignified, gentlemanly looking person of about fifty. He, to her mind, looked like an officer, and he had a sword-cut down his right cheek.

This part of her evidence caused a sensation, as the person described was evidently Col. Mansfield.

Had, as far as she was aware, anything in the nature of a quarrel taken place at this interview?

To which question she replied, with pardonable sharpness, that it was not her business to listen outside her lodgers' doors to hear what was going on inside, but, as far as she was aware, nothing in the shape of a quarrel had taken place. Indeed, to tell the truth, neither she nor her servants heard any "words" whatever. The gentleman who called did not, moreover, stay very long—perhaps not more than a quarter of an hour in all.

She then gave a description of the finding of the body. It was in the sitting-room, lying on the floor, and the sight gave her a shock she would never forget.

Here the witness perceptibly shuddered. Asked to describe the position of the body, she expressed her unwillingness to do so. The sight was such "an awful one," she said, that she would rather not speak about it.

As medical evidence was forthcoming upon this point, the question was not pressed.

The witness, asked when she last saw the deceased, informed the Court that it was about 10 o'clock on the night of the 5th.

"And where was he, pray, the whole of the time between the night of the 5th and the morning of the 7th when you found his dead body?" asked the Coroner.

"In his room, I suppose," she replied.

"But did it not strike you as strange that a man should stay in his room for thirty-four hours without moving from it?"

"Not at all, sir; he had often done it before. Once a month he used to lock himself up in his room in this way, taking nothing to eat. It was always his express wish that he should not be disturbed, and I thought that such days with him were fast days, and, knowing how

strict these Eastern people are about their religious observances, it didn't strike me as being in any way odd."

"You say he kept his room in this fashion once a month. Do you remember the exact dates?" asked the Coroner.

SHE HAD ORDERED THE DOOR TO BE BURST OPEN.

"Certainly, sir," replied Mrs. Parker, producing an account book. "Every date is noted; for on those days he took, as I have already said, no refreshments of any kind."

She handed the book to the Coroner, who looked carefully through it.

"It is very strange, he said at the conclusion of his examination.

"The first entry is, I see, 11th to 12th February; the second, 12th to 13th March; the third, 11th to 12th April; the fourth, 11th to 12th May; the fifth, 9th to 10th June; the sixth, the 9th to 10th July; the seventh and last, the 7th to 8th August.

"Now these dates exactly coincide with those upon which the murders were committed. It may, of course, be only a coincidence; but it is certainly a very curious one."

Needless to say the Coroner's remarks caused a profound sensation.

Her lodger, Mrs. Parker pointed out, had never kept so long in his room before, and on becoming alarmed at getting no response to the maid-servant's knocks, she had ordered the door to be burst open. The door, she added, was fastened from the inside, the key being still in the lock.

She at once, she added, sent for the doctor, who sent for the police, and they made a careful examination of the rooms.

She was certain that no one had had access to her lodger's rooms during the time stated, and

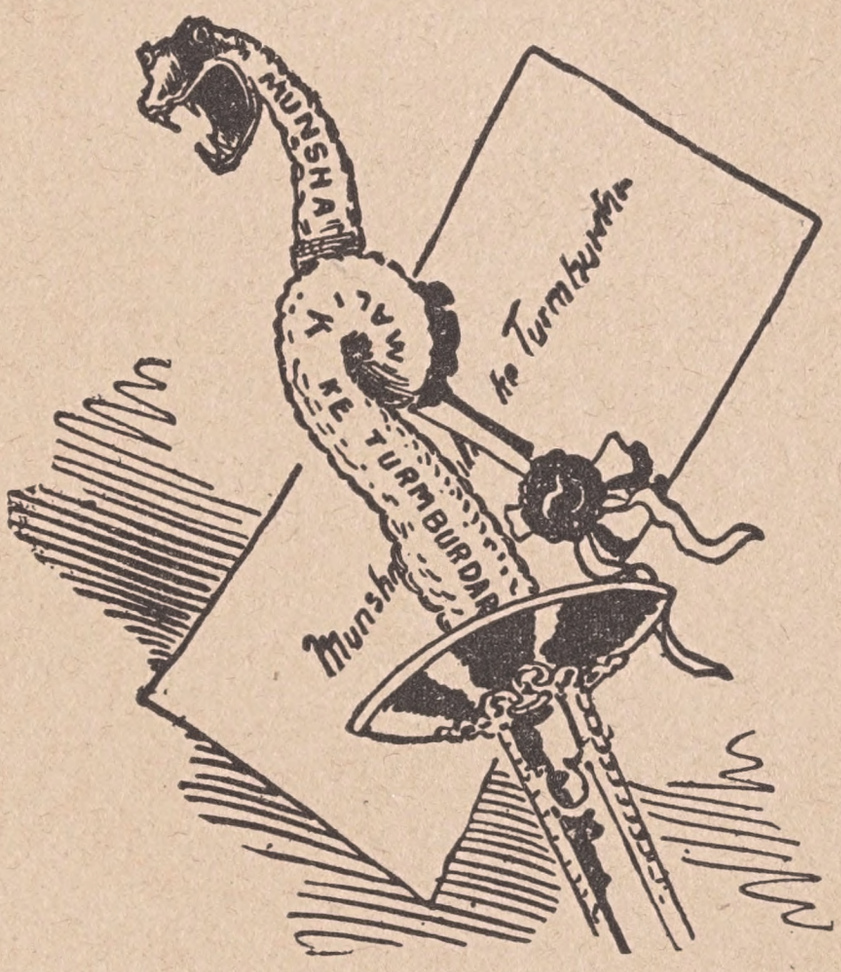
she declared that both the windows of the bedroom and sitting-room, which were on the ground floor looking on to the street, were fastened.

The next witness was Dr. Tilbury. He related how he had been called in by Mrs. Parker. He had come at once; but the deceased was already dead—had, in fact, been dead some hours. He had never seen a more ghastly sight. The body was lying upon its back; the legs were drawn up, and the arms were strangely contorted. The eyes were wide open, and the expression in them showed the agony the deceased must have suffered. The lips were bitten through, and a good deal of foam was mixed with the blood.

Right through his heart was driven a dagger. It was not an ordinary dagger, but was of Indian manufacture and shaped like a serpent, with a fine, long point. To it was attached a slip of paper and a sealed envelope. There was some writing upon it, but the writing was in characters that he did not understand. The dagger and the sealed envelope were taken possession of by the police. The dagger produced was undoubtedly the same. Asked if he knew the meaning of the words raised in Hindustani characters on the back of the serpent

just below the neck, he said he did not. They appeared to be similar in character to the writing on the envelope and on the slip of paper.

In answer to further questions he stated that he carefully examined the body, which, save for a loin cloth, was naked, and found a deep



THE PECULIAR DAGGER WITH THE UNIQUE INSCRIPTION.

burn on the breast about two inches in diameter. It, in his opinion, had been made for the purpose of obliterating some tattoo marks which were probably on the breast of the deceased. It might have been done with the poker, which showed signs of having been heated. There

were no other marks on the body, and death arose from the stab through the heart. The flow of blood had been internal, as only a small clot of blood was on the body. It was his opinion that the death blow had been self-inflicted.

Dr. Harvey was then called, and he stated that the dagger had been handed to him, and that he had carefully examined the poison it contained; it was a vegetable poison unknown in this country before the 12th of February.

"The date of the murder of Florrie Grey," said the foreman of the jury, who happened to be a chemist.

"Yes, and there is no question that the poison the weapon contained is precisely the same as that used in each of the recent murders, and that all these murders were committed with this very dagger."

Intense excitement prevailed in the room when Dr. Harvey made this statement.

"Upon what grounds do you base this belief?" asked the Coroner.

"The shape of the wound is precisely the same in each case," he replied, "and there is not, I should think, in all England another weapon like this." And he took up the

curiously fashioned weapon which lay upon the Coroner's table.

"One more question, Dr. Harvey," said the Coroner. "You, I believe, saw Col. Mansfield on the evening of the 4th—at what hour was that?"

"I saw him at about 6.30 and he left at 7."

"Did he say anything to you about the deceased—that he had been to see him, or that he knew him?"

"Not a word."

"Do you believe the wound was self-inflicted?"

"I do; most certainly."

"That is all, thank you, Doctor."

Harvey retired.

P. C. Robinson deposed how, from information received, he went to 523 Colville street, where he found the body of the deceased. This witness added nothing to what is already known, and Inspector Kinks, of Scotland Yard, was called.

The case, he stated, had been placed in his hands. He had made a thorough examination of the apartments. The windows were fastened, and there was no other way of getting into the rooms excepting through the door, which had been forced.

The body of deceased was naked save for a small black loin cloth. There was no jewelry of any kind upon it. On searching the grate, which contained a heap of ashes, he found some charred ends of what appeared to be bank-notes (pieces of burnt paper produced).

HE TOOK THE CURIOUS WEAPON FROM THE TABLE.

"The room did not show any traces of a struggle having taken place. Everything appeared to be in its proper order, and the state of the dust-covered windows precluded the possibility of any one having either entered or departed that way.

I made a most careful examination of both rooms. The drawers had been emptied of their contents and the clothes of the deceased were torn in strips. Everything belonging to him which had any value appeared to have been either burnt or destroyed."

"The dagger and the note attached to it were taken away by you," said the Coroner, addressing the Inspector. "Have you had the inscription on the dagger translated?"

"Yes, sir, I have the translation here."

The witness took out from his pocket-book a slip of paper and handed it to the Coroner.

"The sentence is in Hindustani, I see:

"Munsha Mālik ke furmuburdār,

and means

"I do the Master's will."

"And the letter and the slip of paper attached to the dagger; has the writing thereon been deciphered yet?"

"Here, sir, is the slip of paper, and the translation is attached," replied the Inspector, handing two pieces of paper to the Coroner.

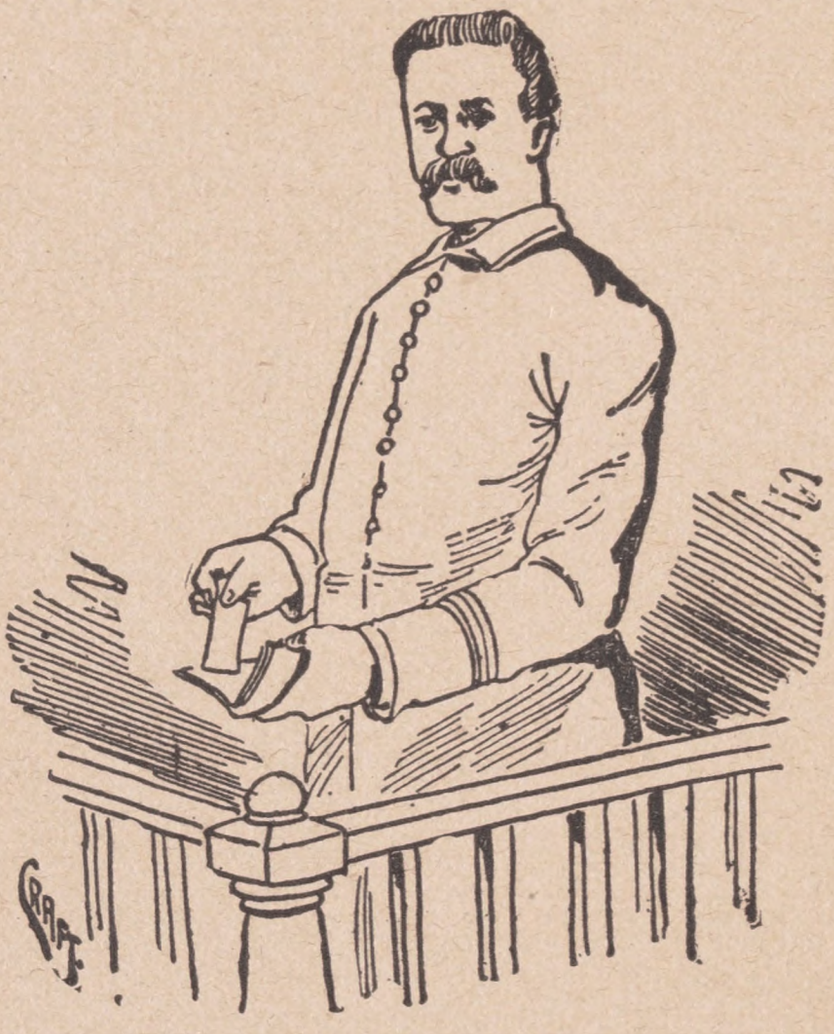
"'Malik ke Gholam hoon'

is the sentence, and the meaning of it appears to be:

'I am the slave of the Master,'"

said the Coroner, looking attentively at the writing before him. "And the letter, what has been made of that?" he added, after a pause.

"The expert who has been doing the translations says that the handwriting on the slip of



THE WITNESS TOOK OUT A SLIP OF PAPER.

paper and on the envelope is undoubtedly that of the same person."

"To whom is the envelope addressed?"

"That is the question, sir. I have a rough translation of it here." He opened his pocket-book and turned over several leaves until he

came to the one he wanted. "It runs something like the following:

"'To my destroyer (or to the one who has caused me to be destroyed)—the Brother of the Light. From the Slave of the Master of Darkness.'"

"And what does the letter contain?"

"That, sir, is what hasn't yet been found out. The translator is at work at it now. It completely puzzles him, and he can't make much sense out of it at present. It's all about masters and slaves, black brothers and white brothers, and other unintelligible things, which makes the translator believe that the man who wrote it must have been raving mad at the time."

"This is most important evidence," replied the Coroner, "and we must adjourn the inquiry for the attendance of the translator. Meanwhile, have you any clue as to the identification of this so-called destroyer—this Brother of the Light?"

"From information received, we believe it to be Col. Mansfield, the gentleman who called on the deceased on the afternoon of the 5th. This gentleman is now lying in a trance at his rooms in the Temple, and instructions have been given to have him closely watched."

CHAPTER XI.

THE evening following the inquest Harvey and Evelyn Hardcastle were seated together

HARVEY AND EVELYN WERE IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

in the drawing-room discussing the extraordinary events of the preceding days.

"Now, dear," said Evelyn, "do tell me how Uncle Lal is."

"There is no change in him," replied the young man. "He still lies in the same condition. It is the most remarkable case of trance I have either seen or heard of."

"I hope, dear, there is nothing to fear," remarked Evelyn, in some alarm.

"I think not," he replied assuringly; "but what perplexes us most is his absolute insensibility, and it is impossible to tell when he is likely to recover consciousness."

"I hope every care is taken of him."

"Certainly, dear; some one is with him night and day, and, as you know, I devote every spare moment I have to sitting by his bedside."

"I wonder, Fred, what the letter he left behind contains. I am most curious about it, aren't you?"

"Yes, most curious, and I feel confident that its contents are of the utmost importance, and that they will give a solution of this terrible mystery."

"When is the letter to be opened?"

"Not till the 20th."

"Why, that is another whole week, for today is only the 14th. I am sure I couldn't wait so long. Don't your fingers itch to open it?"

"Perhaps; but I manage to keep the itching under control," answered Harvey, with a laugh. "Mansfield's instructions are definite on this point, and I mean to carry out his wishes to the letter."

"Of course, dear, I wouldn't have you do otherwise. Uncle Lal's instructions must be sacred in our eyes. Dear Uncle Lal, if it hadn't been for you I shouldn't be alive at this moment," she added with a shudder. "See, Fred, I always wear Uncle Lal's talisman, and it shall never leave my neck night or day." She withdrew from her breast the heart-shaped locket with the scar upon it where the dagger had struck it.

At this moment a servant brought in the *Graphic* and handed it to her young mistress.

Evelyn was turning over the pages when she suddenly gave a surpressed shriek and let the paper fall on the ground.

"It is he! it is he!" she said, her face blanching and her eyes gazing wildly across the room.

"My darling, what does this mean? What ails you?" cried her lover, in alarm, taking her in his arms.

"Oh, Fred, it is horrible! That face brings the terrible scene before me again," she replied, pointing to a portrait of the dead Hindoo which the paper contained.

"Be calm, dear; you are not strong yet, and any fresh shock to your nerves may make you seriously ill. For my sake, my darling, be calm. You have nothing to fear with me by you."

He folded his arms about her and showered kisses on her face.

"I do not fear anything with you by me, dear; but that face" (and she shuddered violently)—"it is that of the one who attempted my life. And that dagger," she added, pointing to a sketch of the weapon found stuck in the body of Râm Dass—"it is the one he aimed at my heart."

The same evening that Evelyn Hardcastle recognized in the portrait of Râm Dass the likeness of the one who had attempted her life, and in the sketch of the dagger the weapon which had been aimed at her heart, Dr. Harvey received a translation of the letter the dead man had left behind in his room.

It was a most curious document, as has been stated, written in Hindustani, and ran as follows:

Eh feringhee!—ba nām Bhaie-i-Rochum tujh per hazār lānet in. In ne apna jadoo ke zor se mara hāth rokhluya!

Unki Jān, tu ne buchaiya, purunth mujhè donon jahán se bigāra. Gholam apna malik-ko-jawab dena hai.

Naŏ chotèn sidhee gayèr tèra futteh ne mujh ko karāb keeya.

. . . . . .

Eh feringhee! malaum, buchogee nahim ba

mooqábilla mera azeeyut, tèra-i dukh kaisa painee na hoga.

. . . . . .

Jis mālik ke Gholam main hoon kirsee oon mèn se jo unke käm men dukhil hain, chorta nahin.

Main ke Râm Dass, chila ka kai chooka hoon —tuj per am tèra log per lānetèn o surap humèsha rehta rahèn.

The following is the English translation thereof :

THE NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON, Sept. 6, 18—.

Accursed—a thousand times be thou, O foreign Brother of the Light ! By the power of thy magic thou hast destroyed me body and soul (literally, ruined me for this world and the next). For to my Master must I, his slave, make answer.

Nine times did I strike true, but thy victory hast undone me.

. . . . . .

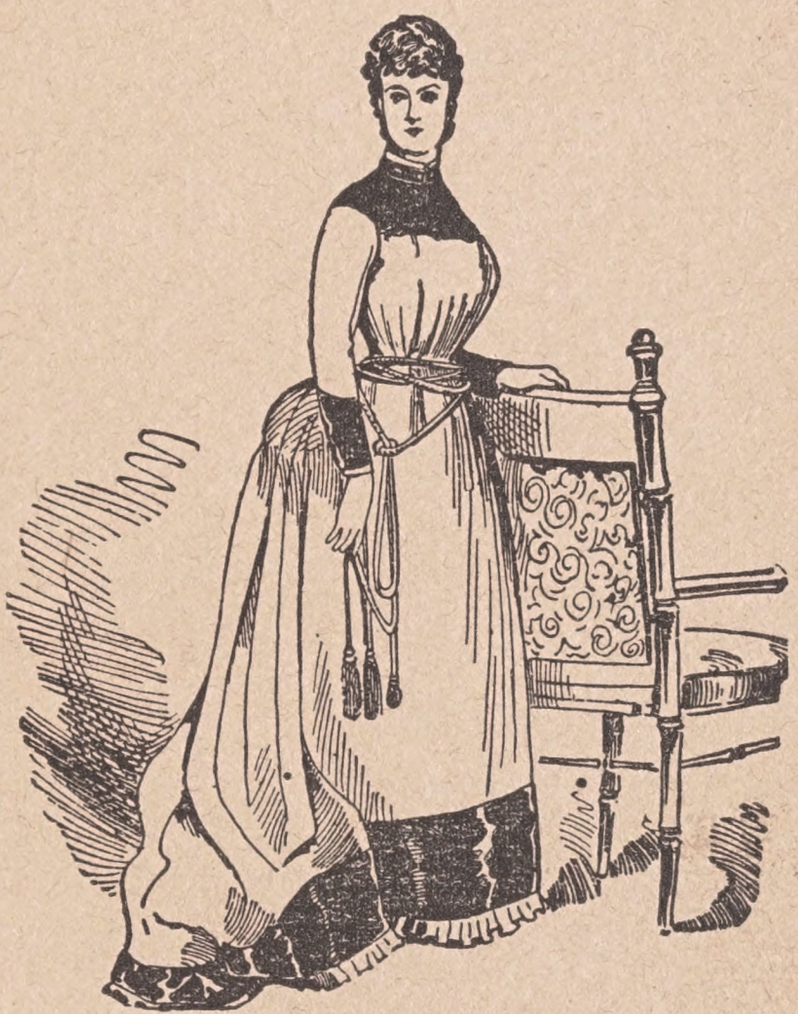
But O accursed one ! thou shalt not escape. My tortures in comparison to what thou wilt suffer will be sweet.

. . . . . .

The Master, whose slave I am, spares none who interferes with his work.

I Râm Dass, the disciple of the Master, have spoken; and upon you and your people may my curses ever remain."

After this there could be no doubt that it was Râm Dass who had committed the nine



"IT IS HE," SHE SHUDDERED.

murders and who had attempted to kill Miss Hardcastle.

He, it was argued, had in a fit of despair taken his own life after cursing Col. Mansfield (for it was clear that the letter was intended for the Colonel); this was the finding of the jury at the adjourned inquest.

Râm Dass was buried in a pauper's grave. He had died without leaving a solitary sixpence behind, and his books and other few effects were seized by the landlady, to whom he was several pounds in debt.

Râm Dass's letter, although it proved him to have been the assassin, threw no light upon the motive for these atrocious crimes.

It was, in fact, to the general public as great a mystery as ever.

"Who was this mysterious Master whose slave this wretch professed to be?" people asked themselves.

The dagger claimed to be "the doer of the Master's will." But who was this Master and what was his will?

No satisfactory answer was given to these queries, and the wisest of men shook their heads in despair.

Col. Mansfield, every one said, was the only man who could throw any light upon the mystery, and he was still lying in a trance from which it was generally thought he would never awake.

One thing, public opinion—or rather that section of it which had rushed to condemn him—now veered round and protested that the gallant Colonel had been grossly misjudged.

Instead of being an associate of murderers and the member of a gang of modern Thugs, he was a paragon of virtue. How, they argued, would Miss Hardcastle have fared if it had not been for him? His hand and his alone had saved her from the assassin's knife and had presumably brought about the destruction of the murderer. The reign of terror was at an end and society could breathe freely once more. And who had brought this about—who but Col. Mansfield?

Col. Mansfield was, folk said, everything that was mysterious and uncanny, but he was a noble-minded man all the same, and employed his mysterious powers to a good purpose; and people began to fear lest the dead Hindoo's curse's had taken effect, and that he would never again return to life and consciousness.

It had got about that the Colonel had left a certain packet behind which was not to be opened till a certain day.

"What could this mysterious packet contain?" said people one to another.

What?

CHAPTER XII.

COL. MANSFIELD'S STRANGE MANUSCRIPT.

IT was the morning of the 20th of September. Dr. Harvey sat in his study reading the letter which Col. Mansfield had left addressed to him. It was an extraordinary document, consisting of about twenty pages of closely written manuscript.

I give the full text:

"THE MORNING OF SEPT. 6, 1888.

"*My Dear Harvey:*

"The fears I expressed concerning the probable selection of Evelyn as the next victim have been realized. I have just had an interview with the would-be assassin. You will at once say, why did I not detain him and hand him over to justice? But such was not in my power. I know my goddaughter to be safe; for the locket which I placed round her neck will protect her from the hand of the murderer. It is a talisman which never fails. On more than one occasion it has saved my life when similarly menaced.

"You will want to know what motive the assassin—who, by the time you read the con-

tents of this letter will be known to you—could have in attempting the life of the one who is so dear to both of us.

"It is a long story, but I will in as few words as possible endeavor to make the matter clear to you.

"The murderer is what is called out in India an adept; and he belongs to a community called the Brethren of Darkness. This community is ruled over by a Master and a Council of Twelve. With the first new moon of the new year some one is enrolled as an adept; and the man Râm Dass—you will have discovered his name by this—was initiated a little more than twelve months ago. I knew him in Calcutta about three years ago. At that time he was a student of the occult sciences, and the result of his investigations interested me not a little. Then he had not joined the Black Brotherhood; and when I called on him yesterday I was quite unaware of his connection with the recent murders. But his complicity therewith has since been revealed to me.

"On his initiation he was deputed by the Master to do a certain horrible thing—namely, to take the lives of thirteen women of a certain affinity. When you pointed out that the murdered women bore a strong physical resemblance

to each other, and that each one had been murdered on her birthday, that birthday falling on the day of the new moon, I at once correctly guessed the motive of these murders. But, while such things are of frequent occurrence in the East, I was puzzled to understand their taking place in the West; but you will find that the murdered persons, although in no way related to one another, were descendants of those who had lived in India, while Evelyn's grandfather was, as you well know, a distinguished Anglo-Indian officer.

"As I have said, murders of this kind occur pretty frequently in India, where many of the deaths ascribed to snake bite are in reality the work of the Black Brethren.

"Why, you will ask, should these Brethren wish to take the lives of those who had done them no injury. To which I answer that the Master and Brothers of Darkness are human only in shape; at heart they are fiends, and they live only to do evil deeds. As a part of their compact with Siva the Destroyer they must offer up at least thirteen souls a year. The victims must be young, beautiful in mind, pure in body and virgin in soul; by this I mean having souls which have not been reincarnated.

"It is only those of this particular affinity

who will be accepted, and when victims fail in the East they are sought for in the West.

"The reasons why Râm Dass selected his victims in London was through his taking up his residence here in order to pursue his studies for the bar. He had to kill thirteen people in his first year as an adept, and had he remained in India he would, of course, have had to find his affinities out there.

"You will probably be aware of a Hindoo's aversion to shedding blood, and you will doubtless say: 'Why were these murders committed with a dagger?'

"This dagger, I reply, is no ordinary weapon; it is endowed with marvellous attributes, and slays almost of its own accord. For, strange as it may seem to you, the hand which holds the dagger is that of the adept's astral form and not of his actual body, which accounts for the going and coming of the murderer unseen. The only thing which could have been visible is the dagger which alone is material.

"You often spoke to me about the strange appearance of the death wound and the unknown character of the poison used, and you very properly surmised that the weapon employed was a fine stiletto which pierced the

heart, the poison stopping the outward flow of blood beyond the first spurt. The first spurt of blood was the murderer's offering to Vishnu, who, according to the doctrines of the Black Brotherhood, takes possession of the spirits of the murdered women for the purpose of reincarnation.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I KNOW you will view with amazement my statements," continued Col. Mansfield in his extraordinary manuscript, "if you do not altogether question my sanity, but what I am telling you is, believe me, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

"To return to Râm Dass. I have already explained to you that it was not within my power to detain him. All I could do was to make the one whose life he threatened safe against his attack, and this I did. I know that he will fail, and that his failure will mean his destruction.

"Failure on such a mission has but one punishment—that of death. He will go in astral form to report to the Master and the Brethren the result of his murderous attempt. They will judge him and condemn him to death.

First, the sign of his initiation—a cresent with a black serpent trailing across it like a bar sinister—which is branded on his breast, will be burnt out with a searing iron; and then he will die by his own hand. What happens in the astral form will be repeated with the physical form. His soul will also be condemned to undergo a certain punishment: but what that punishment will be I cannot at this moment tell.

"The man is beyond human justice by this. He cannot escape his fate any more than he could have evaded the work of the mission upon which he was sent.

"You will want to know how I know all this, and what was the particular virtue of the talisman which I hung round Evelyn's neck.

"It would take more time than I have now to spare to explain this matter thoroughly to you. Suffice it to say that there are two Brotherhoods of what you in the West are pleased to call the Occult. One is the Brotherhood of Light and the other of Darkness; and while the latter endeavors to debase mankind and arouse all the evil that is in them, the former seeks to spiritualize man and to lead him towards higher and nobler things. Between the two Brotherhoods there is a perpet-

ual war, the Brothers of Darkness seeking to destroy those whom the Brothers of Light endeavor to save. The Brothers of Light, in virtue of the purer life they lead and the greater knowledge they have of the active forces of Nature, are able to achieve greater results in the realms of the Occult than those of Darkness, but as there is as a general thing more evil in man than good, the Brothers of Darkness are enabled to lead more souls to destruction than those of the Light are able to save. In this matter the victory, while man is as he is, is with those of Darkness.

"For my part, you will doubtless long since have guessed that I am a member of the Brotherhood of Light.

"It happened in this way:

"Ten years ago, when I was in Thibet, I came across a Brother who initiated me. The method of initiation is a secret, and I cannot here explain it.

"I remained with this Brother for close upon two years, sharing the same cave with him and living even as he did.

"In this way I made myself master of many of the treasured secrets of nature, and rediscovered what this material world has long since forgotten, the connecting links between man and the elements.

"In the end I was admitted into the sacred presence of the Master and enrolled as a Brother. Much more of the unknown was then made known to me, and I was given the power of separating my soul from my body.

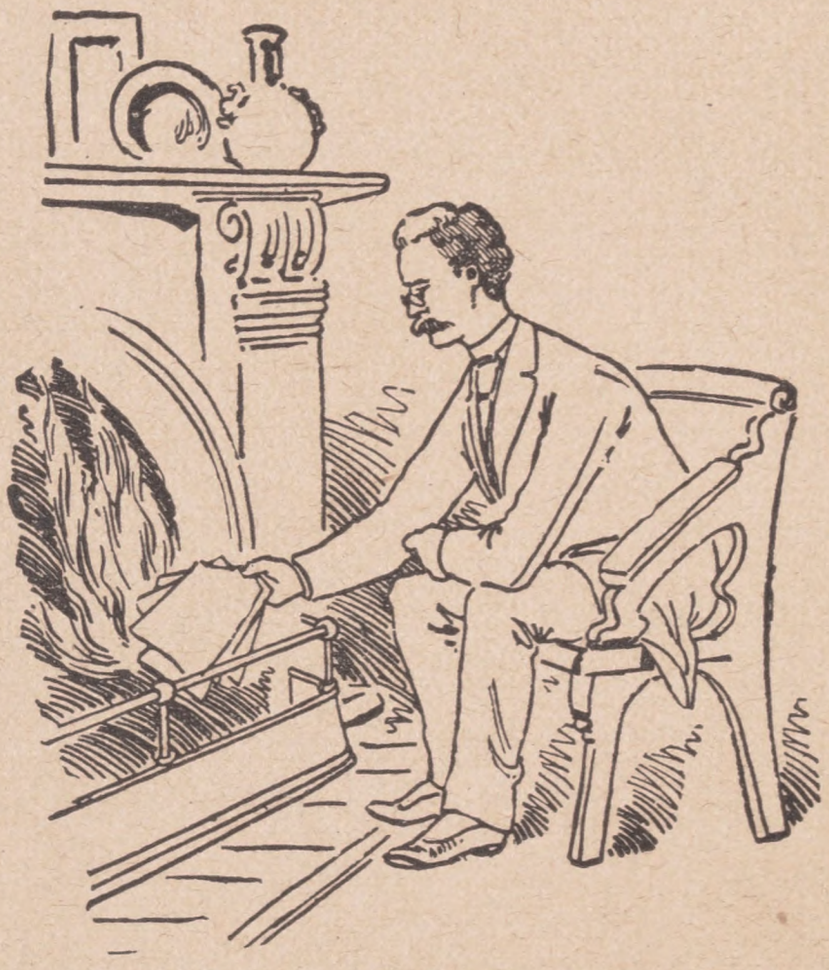
"The human form is, after all, but the case which contains the soul. Destroy the shell and the spirit escapes and seeks another habitation. This even you, sceptic that you are, cannot deny. All people, no matter how civilized or how savage they may be, believe in the existence of a soul in some shape or other. But while the body—the outer covering of man—is known in every particular, how many have been able to analyze and dissect the soul? Your materialist, with dissecting knife in hand, cuts and rips the inanimate dead, and says with an air of triumph: 'see, I have laid bare every nerve; here is the brain, there is the heart, where is soul?'

"Of course the soul is not there. To search in a dead body for Life is only to find Death. When the power of living is taken from the body the spirit at once leaves it. It does not die; it merely escapes, and in due course finds another earthly shell in which to reside.

"To find the soul, therefore, you must search for it in the living and not in the dead.

"On the night of my being made an adept

I lay on my back on a white marble bench of a Buddhist temple thousands of feet above the level of the sea. The temple was roofless and open to the sky, and above me shone the bright stars, and the rays of the full moon fell across my face. In a little while I slept, and then a strange thing happened. My body



HE CAST THE MS. INTO THE FIRE.

grew stiff and all physical movement was suspended. But while my body remained motionless and connected with life by the merest thread, my brain was additionally active. I could think and see. It seemed to me that my motionless form was permeable, and that, like the earthenware jugs of the Nile, from

which ooze the water they contain, it was affording egress to my imprisoned soul.

"Then my spirit, having freed itself, stood before me, clothed with my shape, but as immaterial as a shadow. There stood my soul contemplating me, and there lay I, observing my soul. Presently my spirit took wings, as it were, and passed upward into the starry night. Then I seemed to be no longer lying on the marble bench; my thought and sight went with my astral body. I, in this astral form, soared above the earth. Space was annihilated, and I, with the quickness of an electric flash, could appear wheresoever I willed.

"Since then I have been able to detach my soul from my body at will.

"In this state of suspended animation you will find me. I shall be as one dead, but not with the death of decay, for the spark of life will be still within my body, but the spirit, the imperishable soul, will be absent.

"The Brothers of Darkness will seek to revenge themselves on me for thwarting their plans, and the order will go forth that I must die. Emissaries will be sent to take my life, for my earthly form will no longer be protected, by the talisman I received from the hands of the Master.

"They will come expecting to find me un-

protected, but I shall disappoint them. Ere danger can threaten me I shall have separated my soul from my body and have journeyed to the Dominion of Light, where the Master of Darkness has no power over me. The messengers of Darkness will not molest my body; it is my soul they want, and that, as I have said, will be absent.

"With the full moon the power of the Master of Darkness will cease, and then, and then only, will my spirit reinhabit its earthly envelope.

"Come, therefore, to my rooms on the 20th of this month, a little before midnight, and I shall be once more with you.

"Step within the circle drawn on the carpet in the outer room as Big Ben strikes 12.

"Be not afraid of anything you may see or hear, for no harm will come to you.

"Come alone, or with whom you will. But do not, on any account, speak of this matter to Evelyn, or, indeed, to any one, beforehand, and when you have read what I have written cast it into the fire.

"With respect to Evelyn, she will never again be threatened, for the Master of Darkness has no power over one whom the Master of Light protects. The strangely wrought dagger,

too—'The doer of the Master's will,' as it is called—will take no more lives. It has become forfeit to my Master, who will deal with it accordingly.

"Now, my dear Harvey, time presses, and I must bring this hurried communication to an end.

"I want you to promise me, not only to destroy what I have written, but never to ask me a single word upon the subject when we again meet.

"This much I feel sure you will do.

"Do not, I beg you, alarm yourself on my account; for it will, I trust, be well with me.

"Till the 20th, then, good-by. Yours,

'LIONEL MANSFIELD.

"P. S.—If death should, however, overtake me before I can have placed myself in a position of safety, you will know why and how it has been. It will then remain for you to explain matters to Evelyn as your good judgment dictates. I inclose a statement of my affairs and the name and address of my lawyer in case anything goes wrong. I have, as you will see, appointed you sole exccutor.

"L. M."

Harvey read this extraordinary letter over

and over again until every word was burnt into his memory. Then he took his friend's closely written pages and cast them into the fire.

Out of the smoke weird forms seemed to his distorted fancy to shape themselves and shrivel to dust in the devouring flames.

CHAPTER XIV.

At about 11.30 on the night of the 20th Harvey went to Mansfield's room in the Temple.

A lamp was burning in the sitting-room and the rays of the full moon flooded the bedroom where Mansfield was lying.

All was still; even the attendant, who should have been on the watch, was asleep.

He awoke with a start as Harvey closed the door, and glared wildly about him.

"What ails you, Jackson?" said the young doctor, shaking him by the shoulder.

"Nothing, sir; but you gave me a regular start. I have had a horrid dream, sir, all about spirits and devils, and I thought at first that you was one of 'em when you came in."

"Then you have been to sleep?"

"Yes, sir, I must own to having done so," replied the man sheepishly: "but it is awful

monotonous watching and waiting here, and I was thinking of asking you to get some one else to take my place. To tell you the truth, sir, this ain't a fit place for a Christian to be in."

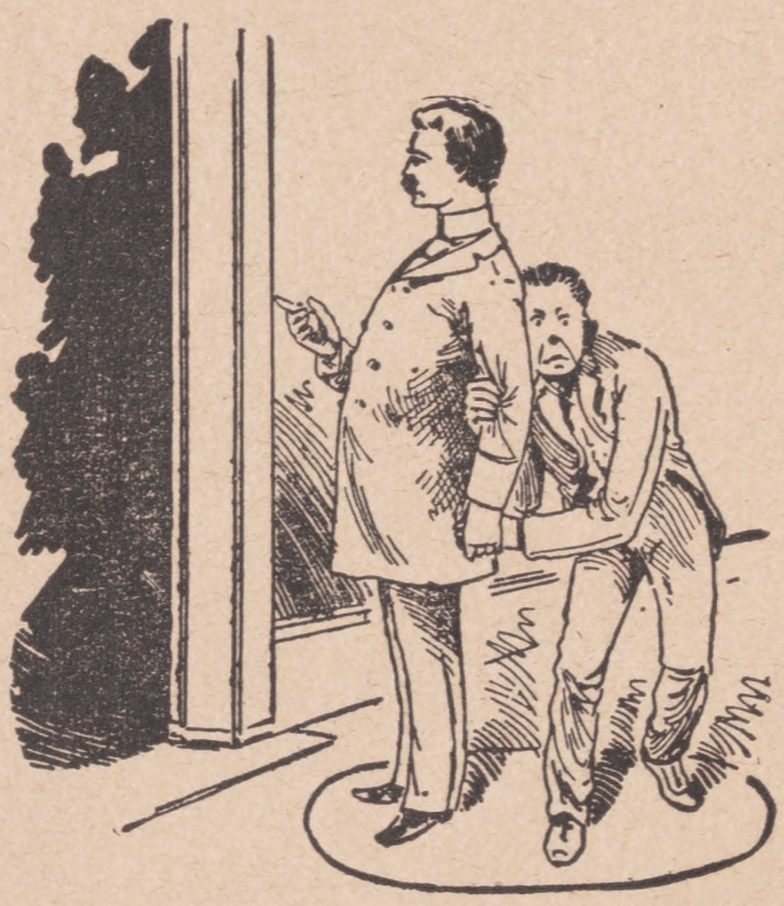
"How, Jackson?"

"Well, sir," replied Jackson, after some hesitation, during which he looked cautiously around the room; "a most awful thing happened here last night—something which makes my blood run cold to think of it. The Colonel had a visitor!"

"A visitor?"

"Yes, sir, if a devil with glaring eyes, big yellow teeth and large bony hands can be called such. How he came in I don't know, but come in he did, and never before did I have such a turn. He stood by the Colonel's bedside, and watched him like a cat would a mouse. He had a rope in his hand, and this rope he put round the Colonel's neck; then he opened the Colonel's white dress and felt about his heart. His examination didn't seem to satisfy him, for he made use of some words, which, although I didn't understand, sounded very like curses. He put his ear on the Colonel's heart and listened; then he made some passes over him and muttered something in a jargon I had never heard before. He appeared to be trying to

wake the Colonel, and when he found it was no go his language was awful. And the expression on his face, sir, was such as I have never seen on that of any man—not even in pictures. To tell the truth, sir, I couldn't look at him any longer, and I crawled underneath the table;



HE STEPPED INTO THE CIRCLE AND WAITED.

and when I did venture to take a peep he was gone."

"Where did he go and how?" asked Harvey.

"That is what I can't find out. He didn't pass me, that is certain, and he couldn't have gone through the window, for it was fastened; and, sir," added Jackson, with a hushed voice, "there is no chimney in the bedroom."

"You must have been dreaming," said Harvey.

"Dreaming! Not me, sir! I was as wide awake as I am now. You see this mark," and he held up his hand; "that's where I bit myself to see if I was awake or asleep."

"But if you were awake, why didn't you lay hold of the man you saw? According to your story, he was in the next room with the object of murdering the man you were set to watch, and yet you, big, burly fellow that you are, were afraid to go near him. I never knew you to be a coward before, Jackson."

"No, sir, I haven't got the character of being a coward, and there isn't a man living that I am afraid of; but, sir, that object was not a living man; he was a devil of some sort or other, and I couldn't have gone near him for the world."

At this point Harvey looked at his watch and found it was within a few minutes of 12.

"Jackson," he said, "I am expecting Col. Mansfield to awake from his trance. If you feel nervous you had better go."

"Nervous, sir? I ain't nervous with you for company, but when one's all alone it's a different matter, and another night like last night would turn my brain."

The first notes of Big Ben came upon the

stillness of the night, and Harvey, drawing Jackson to his side, stepped into the circle.

Big Ben ceased, and the two men waited in breathless suspense for a sign of Mansfield's return to consciousness.

They had not long to wait.

A strange and wonderful thing took place.

The moon was hid by a passing cloud, and outside the window there came a sound like the flapping of wings. A rush of air filled the room, and as the two men watched the motionless body of the Colonel, it appeared to be surrounded by phosphorescent vapor, out of which a luminous form slowly shaped itself.

It was the astral body of Col. Mansfield.

The shadow and its physical counterpart seemed to blend and mingle together. The flush of returning animation lit up the pallid cheeks of the Colonel; his limbs quivered and his lips slightly moved. A convulsive shudder ran through his frame, and, with a long-drawn sigh, Mansfield arose from his bed and stood with the moonlight, no longer hid by the cloud, flooding his face.

Harvey rushed towards him, while the terror-stricken Jackson fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER XV.

But little more remains to be said. Harvey and Evelyn are married; they live in Harley street. Harvey is now an F. R. S. and a man of considerable scientific repute. Evelyn wears the heart-shaped locket night and day, although there is no prospect of her again being selected as one of the "affinities."

Mansfield declined to answer any questions having reference to the strange affair related in the preceding chapter, and he left for India by the next mail.

When last heard of he was making his way through Thibet to the Sacred City of the Lamas. Further news of him is waited with interest, for the mission upon which he has gone is one of great importance.

Before starting on his journey Mansfield expressed his intention of keeping a record of his travels; and it is hoped that this record, which will certainly be of great interest and value, will eventually find its way to this country.

With respect to the dagger, "the doer of the Master's will," it will be remembered that Mansfield, in his letter to Harvey, explained that its power for evil was at an end; and the

reader will probably be interested to know what eventually became of it. Well, a most extraordinary thing happened, which to this day has never been satisfactorily explained.

The dagger was kept by the police locked up in a fire-proof safe, to which no one but the

IN PLACE OF THE DAGGER WAS A SMALL HEAP OF DUST.

Inspector, who had the key, could possibly have access.

On the morning of the 21st the Inspector went to the safe for some purpose or other, and, to his astonishment, the dagger was not there, in its place was a small heap of dust of a pale bluish color.

THE END.

PERDITA.

LEANING over the broken stile, just at the edge of the wood, a girl stood straining her eyes through the gathering gloom. A step sounded beside her, and she turned suddenly.

"Oh, it is only you," she said in a disappointed voice, and the light which had leaped into her dark eyes died out again, leaving them sadder than before.

"It is only I," laughed a young man with pleasant blue eyes and a frank, open face, as he paused a moment beside her. "That was not a very complimentary greeting of yours, Miss Bessie. But will you not take cold out here with those bare arms? There is a dampness in the air that talks of rain."

"I never take cold," Bessie answered, with her eyes still on the woodland path that led

from the village. "Are you going to the village, Mr. Ryder?"

"Yes. Have you any errand for me?"

Bessie shook her head. "No. Cyril—Mr. Hall was to attend to some errands for me. He went some time ago, and I am waiting for his return now. If you should see him, you may tell him I am waiting."

A shadow fell over young Ryder's face, and he took a step nearer the girl, drew in his breath as if to speak, and then strode on without a word through the woodland path.

"There is no excuse for him," he muttered; "he is acting the part of a scoundrel."

He had gone a quarter of a mile, perhaps, when he came face to face with the object of his uncomplimentary meditations—a handsome man of about thirty, dark, lithe, debonair—fascinating Cyril Hall, who had been the pet of fortune and of women all his life, until he was selfish to the heart's core. Young Ryder paused.

"I say, Cyril," he began abruptly, "it is a downright shame the way you are going on

with that young girl down at the house. She is waiting for you at the stile, with her heart in her pretty brown eyes, and I had half a notion to tell her the exact situation of affairs; but I did not."

Cyril took the cigar from between his lips, and carefully knocked the ashes off. Then he said slowly, and with one of his aggravating smiles:

"You exhibited commendable good taste, my dear youth, in minding your own business for once in your life. It is the true secret to success."

"But, I say," insisted Ryder, his blue eyes blazing now, "it isn't fair or manly to deceive the girl so. You may blight her whole life."

"Edward, are you in love with her?" asked Cyril, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder and looking up in his face with mock solemnity. "If so, speak at once, or forever afterward hold your peace. I can account for your zeal in no other way."

Ryder shook the hand off impatiently. "You know better," he said. "But I do

not like to see as nice a girl as Bessie Sanders deceived and made a fool of, and I do not like to see as fine a man as Cyril Hall forget his principle—that's all. I am going back to town to-morrow, and you will not be troubled by my interference any longer, however."

"Going back to town, Edward? Well, I will accompany you then. I am rather weary of this place myself. So tra-la, dear boy, and when I join you later at the hotel try and be in better humor."

Then young Ryder passed on toward the village, and Cyril resumed his cigar and his lazy saunter toward the stile, where the white, handsome face of Bessie Sanders shone like a star through the gloaming.

He leaned across the stile and slipped his arm about her slender waist, his black eyes smiling dangerously. "Patient little girl," he said, "I thought you would grow tired of waiting, and go off in a pet ere this. But I find you here ready to greet me as of old. And do you know it is for the last time? I am going away to-morrow."

He felt the hand he held tremble and grow cold suddenly.

"Not to stay," she said, almost in a whisper; "not for good and all."

"For good and all," he answered, and began to feel very much like the villain he was, and nervously anxious to end the interview. "For good and all, Bessie; and I came to say good-by now, as we start early in the morning. Be a good girl, Bessie, and think of me sometimes."

He moved as if to go, but she clutched his arm with two firm slim hands.

"You—you would not leave me like *this*, Cyril, after all—after all that has passed between us two? You will come back soon—oh, say that you will come back to me, Cyril, before you go."

Her voice was almost a wail. Her eyes shone wild through the dusk.

"Be quiet," he said sternly, "or some one will hear you. I *cannot* come back to you. You must forget me, Bessie. I had no right to ask you ever to think of me. It is better you should forget me at once."

"Why?" she asked sharply, her face bent forward so that her eyes looked straight in his; "why? Is it because some other woman has a better right to you than I have, Cyril? Did you leave some one behind you who was dearer to you than I am?"

Her hands held his arm so closely that she hurt him, but not so keenly as her voice hurt. Oh, what a miserable cowardly wretch he felt himself to be! He turned his face away.

"Yes," he said, speaking very quickly and nervously now. "Yes, I left another woman behind me, Bessie; and that woman was —my wife. I have been married four years, and I have a boy three years old. Now you know, and you *must* forget me."

He felt her hold relax upon his arm, and she stood up straight and thin and white in the starlight. She lifted one hand with an intensely dramatic gesture.

"Go," she said, "and may God's curse fall on you, and on your boy. As for your wife—I pity her."

Then she turned and vanished in the darkness.

Cyril shrank involuntarily under her menacing gesture and vindictive curse. Then he slowly pursued his way back toward the village, but it was very late before he joined young Ryder in their rooms, and when he did, Ryder found him irritable and moody.

"Well, I have been looking over accounts, old fellow," Ryder said, as his friend came in, "and I find it has been a very successful six weeks for me."

Edward Ryder was a civil engineer and surveyor, and had come out into this region on Government business.

Cyril threw himself on a couch.

"And I find it the most *unprofitable* six weeks of my life," he said. "I wish to heaven I had staid in the city, or followed my wife and boy to her mountain home. It was a foolish freak of mine, coming out West here with you."

"Just the different view a man takes who kills time, from one who uses time," Ryder replied. "It is too bad, Cyril, that you have so much money and leisure. You

would be a happier man if you had more to do in this life—more to struggle for."

"Well, let's be done with preaching and go to sleep," growled Cyril.

"You've done nothing but preach to me all day," and, with this, he turned his back on his friend and began preparations for retiring.

And afar in the green mountain home of her childhood, where she was making her yearly visit, a fair-haired woman was listening to the prayer of a white-robed child who knelt with clasped hands and lisped:

"God bless papa Cyril, and make him a good man, and may he never forget mama and baby."

It was a sentence Helen Hill taught her baby boy to repeat nightly, as soon as he could talk—and the shadow in her eyes, when her handsome, debonair husband was out of her sight, told of the fear that had given rise to the prayer

While somewhere at that very moment a girl of seventeen, with passionate, dark eyes, and a mass of disordered, dark hair, lay

face downward on the green, cool earth muttering, between her clenched teeth:

"Curse him, curse him, curse him."

A group of genteel loungers filled a fashionable club-room one afternoon in late January. Their ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-five. Some handsome, some blasé, all were dressed and having the appearance of wealth and culture.

"Who plays to-night at the —— theatre?" asked Harold Weston, suddenly. "I have just come in town and have lost all track of the amusements."

The young man addressed twirled his cane, laughed, and answered, with a mischievous glance at the assembled crowd:

"Ask Claude; he can tell you."

At this there was a general laugh, while the young man referred to flushed scarlet and lowered his eyes upon the paper he held in his hand.

He was a remarkably handsome youth of possibly eighteen. Tall, splendidly proportioned, with large violet-blue eyes and rich

chestnut hair, and the features of a Greek statue. A father's pride, and, until that mother died, a mother's darling. An only son, of independent wealth, who had enjoyed every advantage of culture and travel, and was now just freed from college, where he had borne off the honors of his class.

Blasé Harold Weston looked at the youth with amused eyes.

"What is it, boys?" he queried. "A case of *bad mash*—to be inelegant but expressive. And who is the goddess who has fatally wounded our Apollo?"

"It is rather another case of Venus and Adonis," laughed Charlie Foster, "only Adonis is not so shy as of old."

"But who is she?" queried Weston. "Why all this mystery? Come, Claude, out with it, old fellow."

Claude laid down his paper.

"I believe the question you asked, to begin with, was, Who plays at the —— theatre to-night? If you appeal to me to answer that question, I will very gladly. It is *Perdita*, the sensation of the day, and with-

out doubt the finest actress now before the public."

The group of young men looked at each other and smiled. Claude's enthusiasm over Perdita had been the talk of the club for some time.

"What does she play?" queried Weston, anxious to know all about the subject under discussion.

"Society plays altogether, but she is studying some of Shakespeare's characters, and will no doubt distinguish herself therein," Claude replied.

"I doubt it," responded Charlie Foster. "I do not think she is great enough for anything of that kind. She is doing her best work now—all she is capable of."

"How old is she?" continued Weston.

"About twenty-four or five," Claude answered quickly.

Foster laughed. "Oh, nonsense!" he ejaculated. "She is thirty-five if she is a day, Weston. I own she looks as young as twenty-five off the stage, and younger on the boards. But I have seen too many

actresses to be deceived. She is certainly in her early thirties."

"Rather a mature Venus for our Adonis, eh!" teased Weston, and Foster answered:

"Yes; but you know that is usually the form young love takes. My first passion was inspired by a widow, fair, fat and forty, while I was only sixteen."

Claude rose to his feet, white, angry, his blue eyes blazing.

"I say, boys, this has gone far enough," he cried. "I don't mind a little chaffing, but I think you are getting downright insulting. I believe I am entitled to fair treatment in this club, and I leave it to any or all of you to say if I ever used any member as I am being used this afternoon."

He was hurt as well as angry—they all saw that. And they all loved Claude as a brother. He was the best and kindest-hearted youth in the club, and the most generous.

"I beg your pardon, Claude," Foster said, holding out his hand. "We were only in jest, but we carried it too far. Forgive us."

Claude took the proffered hand. "Let it drop," he said. "And now, boys, I invite you all to go *en masse* with me to the play to-night. It is to be the Lady of Lyons—Perdita's best. Will you go?"

"Yes; and I invite you all to a supper at my chambers after the play," added Weston.

"Done!" cried a chorus of voices. But Claude hesitated.

"I am engaged for supper after the play," he said; "but I thank you all the same."

Nothing more was said, but they all understood what Claude's engagement meant.

That night at the supper in Weston's room it was discussed.

"Claude went with Perdita, I suppose," Weston said inquiringly.

"Oh, yes; he is with her every night after the play, and usually an hour or two every afternoon. It seems too bad. She is evidently a designing woman, and will not be content until she has taken his last dollar."

"What does his father say?"

"He is in total ignorance of the state of

affairs so far, I think. You know Claude has been a model boy—no vices at all, and knows nothing about women, except his mother."

"Just the sort of youth to be led away by a modern Delilah," Weston responded. "Can't any of you give him a warning?"

"No; he won't take a word from us. You saw how he flashed this afternoon. If he hears us discussing her too freely, he gets up and walks away. It is a case of complete infatuation, and must wear itself out."

"There is no infatuation more hopeless, while it lasts, than that of first passionate youth for a mature woman," Foster said. "Perdita knows this, no doubt, and makes use of it to help fill her coffers. What wonderful eyes she has. They were like coals of fire as they fell on Claude. I saw her look straight at him several times."

"Yes; she plays *at* him half her time—we have all seen it."

"Does anybody know anything about her? Who is she? Married or single?"

"No," Foster said. "She is a mystery.

She came from California well advertised, and her beauty and magnetic power and talents did the rest. She has drawn well here. The men go wild about her, but Claude is the worst hit of all. He believes her a model of virtue and goodness, and all that."

"Poor fellow! Ah, well! he must have his day like the rest of us, and be wiser and sadder afterward. But I hope he'll come out of it all right, for his father's sake. He pins all his hopes in heaven on that boy."

"About the only chance he will have, I fancy, for I am told he was a reckless rake in his youth, and never reformed till a little while before his wife died."

"Then he can't be hard on Claude if he does squander his fortune on Perdita. He need only recall his own early youth, and remember how successfully he outlived them."

And while this conversation was going on, the subject of it sat in Perdita's boudoir enjoying the delights of a *tête-à-tête* supper with the object of his infatuation. For

Claude *was* as wholly fascinated as his companions believed.

He only lived in the presence of this siren—away from her the time was only a dreary longing for the hour to come when he could go to her.

As he gazed now into the rich tropical beauty of her face, his whole soul lay in the azure of his beautiful eyes, like a flower in a brook. He was so guileless, so unsophisticated for a youth reared as he had been.

"And so you refused the supper with your friends to come to me," Perdita said caressingly, letting her splendid eyes rest upon his face. "That was very kind of you."

"Kind!" he repeated. "Is it kind of disembodied spirits to go into the gate of Paradise when it is left open for them?"

"You flatterer," she murmured, and she laid one soft hand on his.

Her touch thrilled through every nerve of his body. His eyes glowed. He leaned forward and his breath fanned her cheek.

"Do you know," he said, almost in a whisper, "I am like a drunken man in your presence; I am in a strange sort of delirium; and when I am away from you I wonder constantly why it is that you seem to care for me. I cannot understand it."

"Can you not?" she said, and a curious smile crossed her face—a smile that for a second swept all the beauty out of it, and left it cold and hard and cruel. But it was gone before Claude saw it.

"Can you not? Well, some day I will tell you why—but not now."

"Come and sit on yonder divan with me, and tell me all you have done since I last saw you, and tell me what your friends thought of the play."

"What is this I hear, Claude, of your running after an actress. Is it true?"

It was Claude's father, the spare-faced, austere Wall-street merchant who asked the question.

The guilty tide that crimsoned Claude's face made answer before he spoke.

"It is true, sir, that I sometimes go to see the actress Perdita," he answered.

"Sometimes? Well, how often is that?"

"Every day—sometimes oftener."

Claude could no more have lied than he could have committed a theft. And, beside, his love made him fearless.

The Wall-street merchant bit his lip to repress an oath.

"And how much money have you squandered upon her already?" he asked.

A hot color swept over Claude's face.

"Not one dollar," he said. "Perdita has refused to allow me to bring her even costly bouquets. She is not a mercenary woman."

This time an amused smile curved the banker's thin lips.

"You are a precious young fool, Claude," he said, "to suppose that this woman does not care for money. If she refuses your gifts, it is only to get you more thoroughly in her toils. I wouldn't wonder if she meant to marry you, and get possession of all you have, and will have. No doubt she is posted regarding your financial prospect, and, despite

your youth, realizes that she can never hope to do as well again, I would advise you to keep out of her way, Claude. I suppose you must have your fancies; but I don't like to hear you made a subject of ridicule, as I have heard you to-day. Quit this woman at once, Claude, or you will regret it."

And the merchant turned on his heel, believing that he had struck a death-blow to Claude's passion.

"Once knowing he is ridiculed, he will quit her," he reasoned.

He did not dream of the tragedy so near at hand—a tragedy that would bleach his hair in a few short days to snowy white, and age him more than years.

His father's words had set Claude's heart to beating wildly. "Marry him?" Could it be possible that this glorious woman would give herself to him to be his own forever.

An hour later he was by her side, his eyes aglow, his breath coming quick and hard, his flesh burning—a very picture of splendid youth and passionate love.

Perdita arrayed in a long, loose robe of

clinging white, out of which gleamed her snowy arms, her blonde hair negligently arranged, her dark eyes languid, gave him cordial greeting.

She was half reclining on a rich couch, and she motioned him to take an ottoman at her side.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, toying with his hair. "I have been thinking of you all day."

"And I dreamed of you all night," Claude said, as he leaned over her. "Oh, Perdita, my queen, I cannot live without you! Will you be my wife? I have money, position, name, to offer you—do not let a few foolish years stand between us and happiness. Be my wife, Perdita."

His voice trembled, his eyes glowed, his form shook. Then Perdita rose up, and looked him in the face with mocking eyes. Her cruel laugh struck on his ears like jarring discords.

"Your wife," she repeated. "Why, Claude, I am already married. I am the wife of my business manager." Her cruel

eyes saw the color fade from his face, and a deathly pallor succeed it; but there was no pity in them.

"Then, for God's sake," he cried, "what have you been playing with me for—why have you led me on to love you so."

"I will tell you," she answered, slowly. "But first let me show you something."

She slipped her hand into her bosom and drew therefrom a small picture. "Look at it well," she said, "and then listen to my story."

Half an hour later Claude Hill went out upon the street with a look in his eyes that made all who met him start in affright. It was the look of a man who is going mad. That night the city rang with the startling news that young Claude Hill, the Wall Street merchant's son, had shot himself.

Perdita lay on a crimson couch in elegant deshabille, when a card was sent up. She took it, read the name thereon, and a curious look crossed her handsome face. A look

that made the beauty vanish, and left it almost repulsive.

"Admit him," she said to the servant, and again her eyes fell on the card. The name written on it in a bold free hand was Cyril Hill. "At last!" Perdita said, under her breath, and then the door opened, and the Wall Street merchant—or a pale, haggard wreck of him—entered and stood before her. He lifted one corded hand and shaded his eyes, as if he could not bear all at once the sight of the woman he had come to see.

"Mr. Hill—Cyril Hill, I believe," Perdita said, as she arose; and at her voice he looked up.

"Yes," he said; "I am Claude Hill's father—father of the boy you have killed. O woman! woman! for God's sake tell me what drove my boy to his doom. Tell me what you did, what you said, in that last fatal interview."

Perdita's answer was a strange one.

"Look at me," she said, "and perhaps you will know."

He looked at the splendid form, the handsome features, the mass of fluffy blonde hair, the dark eyes. "Do you know me?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I only know you as the murderess of my boy—my only son," he said, and a great sob shook his whole form.

She smiled. "It is not strange," she said; "and yet I should have known you anywhere, Cyril Hill. Ah! the day has been long, long in coming—but I knew it would come."

He looked at her wonderingly. "What are you talking of, woman," he cried. "If you have anything to say to me, speak at once. I came to demand speech from you."

"I have much to say to you," Perdita replied. "But first let me correct an error of yours. You spoke just now of the death of your only son. You mistake—*he* is living."

She thrust before his face the picture she had shown to Claude: the picture of a child with large weird eyes, and a face of uncanny

beauty. And yet there was no mistaking the resemblance between the picture and the face that gazed upon it.

Cyril Hill cast a questioning, frightened look at the woman before him. "Good God! who are you," he cried, "and what do you mean?"

"I am," she said, smiling her cruel smile again, "I am, to the world, Perdita, the actress; but you have known me under a different name, Cyril Hill; and our meeting is quite as dramatic as our parting was there by the broken stile on that summer night fifteen years ago. Only now you are the sufferer."

"Bessie!" he cried, in a startled whisper; "impossible. She had dark hair—and she would be older."

She laughed. "I bleached my hair for stage purposes," she said, "and I am just thirty-two, Cyril Hill, though I know I do not look it. It is a wonder I do not look twice that—after all I have suffered. Did you never wonder what became of me? Did you never think it possible my hour would

come? Oh, God! I was so young, so innocent when you found me—so old, so wicked when you left me there in the night alone with my despair. I do not know how I lived; but I did live to have my disgrace drive my poor old mother into her grave, and then I fled—fled like a wild hunted thing through many days and nights until I fell by the roadside. When I came to consciousness I was in a city hospital, cared for by kind hands. I remained there until I was well and strong, and then I went out to seek for work. I wandered the streets day after day, and when at last I stood despairing upon the bridge spanning the river that rushed upon its restless way, longing for death, yet fearing to make the final plunge, a man saw me. He was a member of a theatrical troupe then forming in the city. 'Come with me,' he said, 'your face and form have a better mission than to lie bloated and discolored at the bottom of yonder river.' I went—not knowing, not caring whither. Three years later I began the career which has brought me success, money,

power—everything but happiness. How do you like the story, Cyril Hill?"

She paused, and he lifted his bowed head—a head grown strangely white during the last twenty-four hours. While she had talked, and while he had listened, wild emotions of pity, remorse, and a possible reparation were in his heart. He touched the picture that she still held.

"And he—is he living? I think you said he was?" he almost whispered, leaning near her with a look of agonized interest in his eyes. After all, he might make *some* reparation and not be left wholly alone in his old age.

"He is living," Perdita answered.

"Where?"

"He is insane, and has been from his birth. He is in the asylum at W——," was her answer. "He does not know me from his keeper. You have heard all. Now, go."

And Cyril Hill went from the presence of the woman he had wronged so long ago, broken, bowed, and desolate. His sin had found him out.

DAVE'S WIFE.

"So Dave has brought his wife home?"

Deacon Somers cut a larger chip from the stick he had been whittling down to a very fine point as he answered Deacon Bradlaw's query by the one monosyllable, "Ye-a-s."

"Got home last night, I hear."

"Ye-a-s;" and the stick was coming down to a very fine point now, so assiduously was the deacon devoting all his energies to it.

Deacon Bradlaw waited a moment, with an expectant air; then he clasped one knee with both hands, and leaned forward toward his neighbor.

"Well, what do you think of your boy's choice?" he asked. "What sort of a woman does she seem to be? Think she'll be a help in the church?"

Deacon Somers was silent a moment. Whirling the whittled stick around and

around, he squinted at it, with one eye closed, to see if it was perfectly symmetrical. (Deacon Somers had a very mathematical eye, and he liked to have everything "plumb," as he expressed it. He had been known to rise from his knees at a neighbor's house in prayer-meeting time and go across the room and straighten a picture which offended his eye by hanging "askew.") Having convinced himself that the stick was round, the deacon tilted back against the side of the country store where he and his companion were sitting, and began picking his teeth with the aforesaid stick, as he answered Deacon Bradlaw's question by another, and a seemingly irrelevant one.

"Do you remember Dave's hoss trade?"

"No," answered the deacon, surprised at this sudden turn in the conversation, "I can't say't I do."

"Wa'al, just after he come home from college, two years ago, he got dreadfully sot against the bay mare I drove. I'd had her for years, and she was a nice steady-going animal. We had a four-year-old colt too,

that I drove with her. Wa'al, Dave he thought it was a shame and a disgrace to drive such a ill-matched span. The young hoss was right up and off, and the bay mare she lagged behind about half a length. The young hoss was a short stepper, and the bay mare went with a long, easy lope. They wasn't a nice-matched span, I do confess.

"Wa'al, Dave he kept a-talkin' trade to me till I give in. He said he knew of a mighty nice match for the young hoss, and if I would leave it to him he'd make a good trade. So I left it to him, and one day he come drivin' home in grand style. The old mare was traded off, and a dappled-gray four-year-old was in her place. A pretty creature to look at, but I knew, the minute I sot eyes onto her, that she'd never pull a plough through the stubble-ground, or haul a reaper up that side-hill o' mine.

"'Isn't she a beauty, father?' said Dave.

"'Yes,' says I; 'but handsome is as handsome does applies to hosses as well as to folks, I reckon. What can this 'ere mare do, Dave?'

"Dave's face was all aglow. 'Do?' says he. 'Why, she can trot a mile *in two minutes and three-quarters*, father, and I only give seventy-five dollars to boot 'twixt her and the old mare.'

"Wa'al, you see, I was just struck dumb at that there boy's folly, but I knew 'twa'n't no use to say a word then. I just waited, and it come out as I expected. The dappled-gray mare took us to church or to town in fine style—passed everything on the road slick as a pin. But she balked on the reaper, and give out entirely on the plough. And I hed to buy another mare for the hoss, and let the dappled mare stand in the stable, except when we put her in the carriage."

Deacon Somers paused, and his glance rested on Deacon Bradlaw's questioning, puzzled face,

"Well?" interrogated Deacon Bradlaw.

"Wa'al," continued Deacon Somers, "Dave's marriage is off the same piece as his hoss trade. Pretty creature, and can outstrip all the girls round here in playin' and singin' and paintin' and dressin', but come to washin'

and bakin' and steady work—why, we'll hev to get somebody else to do that, and let her sit in the parlor. Mother 'n' I both see that at a glance;" and the deacon sighed.

"I see, I see," mused Deacon Bradlaw, sympathetically. "Too bad! too bad! Dave knew her at college, I believe?"

"Yes; they graduated in the same class She carried off all the honors, and the papers give her a long puff 'bout her ellycution. Dave's head was completely turned, and he kept runnin' back and forth to see her, till I thought the best thing for him to do was to marry her and be done with it. But Sarah Jane Graves would have suited mother 'n' me better. You know Dave and she was pretty thick before he went off to college."

"She's a powerful homely girl, though," Deacon Bradlaw said; "and the awkwardest critter I ever see stand in church choir and sing. Seems to be all elbows somehow."

"Ye-a-s—ye-a-s; a good deal like the bay mare Dave was so sot against—awkward, but steady-goin' and useful—more for use than show. Wa'al, wa'al I must be going

home; all the chores to do, and Dave's billin' and cooin'. Good afternoon. Come over and see us."

When Dave Somers and his bride walked up the church aisle, the next Sunday morning, over Parson Elliott's congregation there passed that indefinable flutter which can only be compared to a breeze suddenly stirring the leaves of a poplar grove. Every eye was turned upon the handsome, strong-limbed young man, and the fair, delicate girl at his side, who bore the curious glances of all these strangers with quiet, well-bred composure.

After service people lingered in the aisle for an introduction, in the manner of country village churches, where Sunday is the day for quiet sociability and the interchange of civilities. And after the respective friends of the family had scattered to their several homes, Dave's wife was the one universal topic of discussion over the Sunday dinner.

"A mighty pretty girl," "A face like a rose," "Too cute for anything," "Stylish as

a fashion plate," "A regular little daisy," were a few of the comments passed by the young men of the congregation. To these remarks the ladies supplemented their critical observations after the manner of women: "Her nose isn't pretty;" "Her mouth is too large;" "Her face was powdered—I saw it;" "Her hat was horrid;" "I don't like to see so much agony in a small place." But Sarah Jane Graves said: "She is lovely. I would give the world to be be as pretty as she is. No wonder Dave loved her." And she choked down a lump in her throat as she said it.

All the neighboring people called on Dave's wife during the next month, and, with one or two exceptions, introduced the conversation by the question, "Well, how do you like Somerville?" To the monotony of this query Dave's wife varied her replies as much as was possible without contradicting herself. "I am quite delighted with the fertility of my mind," she laughingly remarked to Dave at the expiration of the first month. "To at least fifteen people who have asked me that

one unvaried question I have invented at least ten different phrases in which to express my satisfaction with Somerville. I have said: 'Very much, thank you;' 'Oh, I am highly pleased;' 'Far better than I anticipated even;' 'I find it very pleasant;' 'It has made a very agreeable impression upon me;' and oh, ever so many more changes I have rung on that one idea, Dave!" and the young wife laughed merrily. But under the laugh Dave seemed to hear a minor strain. His face grew grave.

"I fear I did wrong to bring you here among these people," he said. "They are so unlike you—so commonplace. I fear you are homesick already, Madge."

"No, no; indeed you are wrong, Dave; indeed I am happy here, and like your friends," Madge protested, with tender earnestness.

But as the months went by it was plain to all eyes that Dave's wife was not happy, that she did not assimilate with her surroundings. She made no intimate friendships; she sat silent at the sewing society, and would not

take an interest in the neighborhood gossip, which formed the main topic of conversation at these meetings. She would not take a class at Sunday-school, claiming that she was not fitted to explain the Gospel to any unfolding, inquiring mind, as she was not at all sure that she understood it herself.

Dark insinuations were afloat that Dave's wife was an "unbeliever," or at least a Unitarian, and her fashionable style of dress marked her as "worldly-minded" at all events. Deacon Bradlaw and Deacon Somers held many an interview on the shady side of the village store, and "Dave's wife" always came up for discussion, sooner or later, during those interviews.

"She's settin' a bad example to all of Somerville," Deacon Bradlaw declared. "My gal Arminda's gettin' just as fussy and proud as a young peacock about her clothes; nothin' suits her now unless it looks stylish and cityfied. And I see there's a deal more extravagance in dress among all the womenfolks since Dave's wife came with her high heels and her bustles and her trimmin's.

You ought to labor with her, Brother Somers."

Brother Somers sighed. "I do labor with her," he said, "but the poor thing don't know what to do. Her guardian—she was an orphan, you know—give her the little money she had left after her schoolin', to buy her weddin' fixin's. She'd no idee what plain folks she was a-comin' among. So she got her outfit accordin' to the way she'd been brought up. Lord! she's got things enough to last her ten years, and all trimmed to kill, and all fittin' her like a duck's foot in the mud; and what can she do but wear 'em, now she's got 'em, she says; and I can't tell her to throw 'em away and buy new. 'Twouldn't be economy. She's been with us nigh onto a year now, and she's never asked Dave for a cent's worth of anything."

"But she's no worker; anybody can see that. And you've hed to keep a girl half the time since she's been with you," Deacon Bradlaw added, somewhat nettled that his neighbor made any excuses for Dave's wife, whose fair face and fine clothes and quiet re-

serve had inspired him with an angry resentment from the first.

"Ye-a-s, ye-a-s, that's true," Deacon Somers confessed. "She's no worker. Lord! the way she tried to make cheese; and the cookin' she did! Mother hed to throw the cheese curd into the pig's swill, and the bread and cake she made followed it. More waste from that experiment of her's than we've hed in years; and she was flour from head to foot, and all of a perspiration, and sick in bed from cryin' over her failures into the bargain. The poor thing did try her very best. But it was like the dappled mare tryin' to haul the plough—she couldn't do it, wa'n't built for it."

When Deacon Somers reached home his brow was clouded. His good wife saw it, and questioned him as to the cause. He shook his head.

"I'm troubled about church matters, mother," he said. "The debt fur that new steeple and altar, and all the rest of the expense we've been to the last two years, wears on me night an' day. And Deacon Brad

law he's gettin' mad at some of the trustees, and says he'll never put another dollar into the church till they come forward and head a paper with fifty dollars apiece subscription. I know 'em all too well to think they'll ever do that, and Deacon Bradlaw he's a reg'lar mule. So the first we know our church 'll be in a stew that will send half its members over to the rival church that's started up at Jonesville, with one o' them sensation preachers that draws a crowd like a circus," and Deacon Somers sighed.

"Isn't there something that can be done to raise the money?" asked Mother Somers, anxiously. "Can't we get up entertainments?"

"That's old, and 'taint strawberry season," sighed the deacon. "We couldn't charge more'n fifteen or twenty cents at the door, and that wouldn't bring in much for one entertainment, and nobody would turn out to a second. There don't seem to be no ingenuity among the young folks here 'bout gettin' up anything entertainin'. Our strawberry festival was just a dead failure—barely paid expenses."

Dave's wife, sitting with her pale face, which had grown very thin and wan of late, bent over a bit of sewing, suddenly looked up. Her listlesss expression gave place to one of animated interest. "Father Somers," she began, timidly, "do you suppose—do you think—I could get up a reading?"

"A what?" and Deacon Somers turned a surprised and puzzled face upon his daughter-in-law. It was so new for her to betray any interest in anything.

"A reading. You know I took the prize for elocution when I graduated. I know ever so many things I could recite, and it might draw a crowd just from its being something new. We could charge twenty-five cents admission, and it would give the impression of something good, at least. After they had heard me once they could decide for themselves if I am worth hearing again."

Deacon Somers looked upon the glowing face and animated mien of Dave's wife with increasing wonder. Was this the listless girl he had seen a few moments before?

"'Pon my soul," he ejaculated, "I don't know but it might draw a crowd, just from curiosity. Everybody would go to see Dave's wife. Not that I hev much of a opinion of readin's; never heard any but once, and then I went to sleep. But it might draw, seein' it's you. You can try it if you want to."

Dave's wife did try it. It was announced before service Sunday morning that Mrs. David Somers would give a reading in the church edifice on Thursday evening: admission, twenty-five cents. Proceeds to be applied toward the church debt.

Again there was a breezy stir in the congregation, and scores of eyes were turned upon Dave's wife, who sat in her silent white composure, with her dark eyes lifted to the face of the clergyman.

But Sarah Jane Graves could not help noticing as she had not before the marked change in the young wife's face since the day she entered that church a bride.

"How she is fading! I wonder if she is unhappy?" she thought.

Thursday night came fair and clear. As Deacon Somers had predicted, the announcement that Dave's wife was to give a reading had drawn a house; the church was literally packed. Dave's wife rose before her audience with no words of apology or introduction, and began the recitation of the old, hackneyed, yet ever beautiful

"Curfew shall not ring to-night."

It was new to most of the audience, and certainly the manner of its delivery was new to them. They forgot themselves, they forgot their surroundings, they forgot that it was Dave's wife who stood before them. They were alone in the belfry tower clinging with bleeding hands to the brazen tongue of the bell as it swung to and fro above the deaf old janitor's head. When the recitation was finished two or three of the audience found themselves on their feet. How they came there they never knew, and they sat down with a shamefaced expression.

Sarah Jane Graves was in tears, and one or two others wiped their eyes furtively, and

then the old church walls rang with cheers. So soon as they subsided Dave's wife arose, and, with a sudden change of expression and voice began to give a recital of "An Evening at the Quarters." It was in negro dialect, and introduced one or two snatches of song and a violin air. To the astonishment of her audience Dave's wife picked up a violin at the appropriate time, and played the air through in perfect time and tune; and then the house resounded to another round of cheers, and the entire audience was convulsed with laughter. Everything which followed, grave or gay, pathetic or absurd, was met with nods of approval, or the clapping of hands and the drumming of feet. Somerville had never known such an entertainment before. The receipts for the evening proved to be over forty dollars.

During the next three months Dave's wife gave two more readings, the proceeds of which paid half the church debt, and this so encouraged the members that old grudges and quarrels were forgotten, and Deacon Bradlaw and the elders made up the remain

ing half, and Somerville church was free from debt.

Yet Deacon Bradlaw was heard to say that while he was glad and grateful for all that Dave's wife had done, he did not in his heart approve of turning the house of God into a "the*a*tre." "She performed exactly like them women whose pictures are in the store winders in town," he said, "a-makin' everybody laugh or cry with their monkey-shines. I don't think it a proper way to go on in the house of God. Never would hev given my consent to it ef I'd known what sort of entertainment it was to be."

"Dave's wife ever been a actress?" he asked Deacon Somers when they next met.

"Actress? No. What put that into your head?" answered Deacon Somers, with some spirit.

"Oh, nothin', nothin'; only her readin's seemed a powerful sight like a theatre I went to once. Didn't know she'd been on the stage; it's gettin' fashi'nable nowadays. Anyway, she's missed her callin'. Wait a

minute, neighbor; don't hurry off so. I want to talk church matters."

"Can't," responded Deacon Somers, whipping up his horse. "Dave's wife is sick in bed, and I came to the store to git a few things for her—bitters, and some nourishin' things to eat. She's sort o' run down with the exertion she made in them readin's. She used to be just drippin' with perspiration when she got home."

Dave's wife was ailing for months, unable to do more than sit in her room and paint an hour or two each day. The house was filled with her paintings. They ornamented brackets, and stood in corners, and peeped from the folds of fans, and smiled from Dave's china coffee-cup.

One day Dave proposed to his wife that she should go to her old home—the home of her guardian—and make a visit.

"We've been married fifteen months now," he said, "and you've never been away. I think a change will do you good. You seem to be running down every day."

So she went. After an absence of ten

days she wrote to Dave to send her paintings to her by express. She had need of them; would explain when she returned. Dave packed them carefully, and sent them with a sigh.

Poor Dave! He had come to realize that his marriage was a great mistake. To be sure, he loved Madge yet, but the romance of his youthful attachment had all passed away in the dull commonplace routine of his domestic life, where Madge had proved such an inefficient helpmeet.

He had been blindly in love with his divinity; elated with the fact that he had won her away from two or three other suitors. Madge was a brilliant scholar and a belle, and with the blind faith of young love, Dave had believed that she would excel in domestic duties as in intellectual pursuits. Her ignominious failures, her utter uselessness, and his mother's constant and indisputable references to her inefficiency about the farm-work, had presented her to his eyes in a new light. The brilliant girl who was the pride of the college, and the helpless, thriftless wife whose

husband was regarded with pity by a sympathetic neighborhood, were two distinct individuals, as were also the young elecutionist carrying off the honors of her class, and the tired, tearful woman weeping over her soggy bread and melted butter.

The success in her readings had revived his old pride in her for a time. But her consequent illness and listlessness had discouraged him.

Mrs. Somers saw the express package, and inquired what it was. Dave told her, remarking at the same time that he did not know what she intended to make of them.

"Maybe she's going to give 'em away to those who will appreciate 'em," suggested his mother. "I'm sure we've no room for such rubbish. But her time's no more'n a settin' hen's, and she might as well spend it in that way as any other. She can't do nothin' that amounts to anything."

"I think her readings amounted to a good deal," Dave responded, glad that he could once speak authoritatively of his wife's usefulness.

"Oh, yes; for that emergency. But its steady work that tells. Lor' pity you and father ef I couldn't do nothin' but give readings! Wonder where your meals would come from. Your marriage and your horse trade were 'bout off one piece, Dave. Your wife's pretty in the parlor or on the floor readin', and your mare looks nice and drives nice in the buggy. But they can't work."

Dave's wife came home at the expiration of a month, looking fresher and feeling stronger, she said. And she did not bring her paintings.

Deacon Somers came into Dave's room the night after her return to talk about a certain piece of land that was for sale. It "cornered on" to the deacon's farm, and a stream of water ran across it.

"It will be worth a mint of money to me," he said, "for I can turn that field into a pasture, and all my stock will water itself. But the man who's sellin' wants a hundred and fifty dollars down, He's goin' West, and must have that amount this week. I don't see the way clear to pay it, for expen-

ses have been a good deal of late, takin' doctors' bills and hired help and all into consideration, and my ready money has run low. Do you think of anybody that'll be likely to lend us that amount for three months, Dave?"

But before Dave could reply, Dave's wife spoke.

"Father Somers," she said, "I can let you have the money—not as a loan, but as a gift. I have been of so little use to you, and have made you so much expense, I shall be very, very happy if you will let me do this for you." And rising up, she came and laid a little silken purse in Deacon Somers's hands.

"But where did you get it, child?" asked the wondering deacon, looking from the plethoric little purse to her face, which had flushed a rosy red.

"I sold my paintings," Dave's wife answered. "A gentleman happened to see a little thing I painted, and he said he knew where I could dispose of any quantity of such work. And, sure enough, I sold every

one of those things I painted when I was sick, for good prices. And I decorated some plates for a lady, who paid me well for it. So I have one hundred and seventy-five dollars in that purse, which you are more than welcome to."

Deacon Somers removed his spectacles and mopped them with his silk handkerchief. "I can't do it, my child," he said; "it wouldn't be right. You must keep your own money."

"But I have no use for it," cried Dave's wife. "I intended to spend it all in Christmas gifts for the family, but this is better. I have everything I need. All I ask or desire is to be of some use—and to have you all love me," she added, softly.

"A hundred and seventy-five dollars for that trash! Well, the world is full of fools!" Mrs. Somers ejaculated, when she was told of what had occurred. But she looked at Dave's wife with an expression of surprised interest after that, as if it was just dawning upon her that one might be of use in the

world who could neither cook nor make cheese.

Deacon Somers's farm boasted a fine stone quarry, and he was very busily at work every spare moment, quarrying stone for the foundation of a new barn he was to build. One day Dave drove to town, ten miles distant, with a load of grain for market. It was September, and the market had risen during the last few days. All the neighboring farmers had turned out and hurried their grain away, Deacon Somers remained at home, quarrying stone. Mrs. Somers rang the great bell at noon-time, but he did not come. Then she grew alarmed.

"Some one must go up to the quarry and see if anything has happened," she said. And Dave's wife was off like a young deer before the words were out of her mouth.

It did not seem three minutes before she stood at the door again, with white lips, her dark eyes large with fright. "Father is wedged in under a great bowlder," she said. "You and the girl must go to him. Take the camphor and ammonia; it may sustain

his strength until I can bring relief. I am going to ride the dappled mare to the village, and rouse the whole neighborhood."

"We have no saddle," gasped Mrs. Somers; "and the mare will break your neck."

"I can ride anything," Dave's wife answered as she sped away. "It was taught me with other useless accomplishments."

A moment later she shot by the door, and down the street toward the village. She had bridled the mare and buckled on a blanket and surcingle. She sat like a young Indian princess, her face white, her eyes large and dark, looking straight ahead, and urging the mare to her highest speed. Faster, faster she went, until the woods and fields seemed flying pictures shooting through the air. Half-way to the village, which was more than two miles distant, she met Tom Burgus, the blacksmith. She reined up the mare so suddenly she almost sat her down on her haunches.

"Deacon Somers has fallen under a bowlder in his quarry," she cried. "Go to him—quick! Dave is away." Then she rode on.

At the village she roused half a dozen men, and to the strongest and most muscular she said: "Take this mare and put her to her highest speed. Tom Burgus is already there. You two can lift the bowlder, perhaps. I will ride with Dr. Evans."

The man mounted the mare, and was off like a great bird swooping close to the earth. He swept away and out of sight.

When Dr. Evans reined his reeking horse at the quarry, Tom Burgus and Jack Smith, who had ridden the mare from the village, were propping up the bowlder with iron bars, while Mrs. Somers and her help were trying to remove the deacon's inanimate form. The doctor and Dave's wife sprang to their assistance. In another moment he was free from his perilous position, and Dr. Evans was applying restoratives. "He will live," he said; "but in five minutes more, if help had not come, he would have been a dead man. It is very fortunate you had a swift horse in the stable, and a rider who could keep her seat," and he glanced around at Dave's wife just in time to see her fall in a limp heap.

Deacon Somers was quite restored to his usual health the following morning. "Dave's wife and the dappled mare saved my life," he said to Deacon Bradlaw, who came to call. "So the boy didn't make so poor a bargain either time, neighbor, as I once thought."

The deacon recovered rapidly, and just as rapidly Dave's wife lost strength and color. She faded before their eyes like some frail plant, and at last one day with a tired sigh she drifted out into the Great Unknown; and with her went the bud of another life, destined never to blossom on earth.

After they came home from the churchyard where they had left her to sleep, Dave found the dappled mare cast in her stall: her halter strap had become a noose about her slender throat. She was quite dead.

Over the low mound where "Dave's wife" sleeps the marble mockery of a tall monument smiles in irony at those who pause to read its flattering inscription. It is so easy to praise the dead! And the memorial window sacred to her memory in Somerville

church—a proposition of Deacon Bradlaw's —flushes in crimson shame while suns rise and set.

And a sturdy farm-horse pulls the plough through Dave's stubble field, and Sarah Jane drives the work in his kitchen.

—From Harper's Bazar, by permission.

VIOLET'S EMANCIPATION.

Little Violet Gray, curled up on the lounge in her room, resting after her hard day's work in the ward schools, heard a knock at her door, and lazily answered, "Come." She fancied it was Jessie, the boarding-mistress's daughter, whom she often helped with her arithmetic lessons in the evening. Jessie was overworked and hard pressed for time, and it was little chance she had for study. During Miss Gray's year in the house she had learned more than in all her life before.

The door opened slowly, but it was not Jessie who entered. It was, instead, a lady of imposing height and appearance. She was elegantly attired, and held herself with an air which seemed to say, "Behold, I come!"

Violet rose with more haste than dignity from her reclining posture, and with flushed

cheeks stood before her imposing guest. "Pray, be seated," she said, "and pardon me. I fancied it was a little girl who often comes in my room at this hour."

The imposing presence slowly seated herself, and settled her elegant draperies gracefully.

"You will pardon the intrusion of a stranger, I hope," she said in measured accents and with great deliberation, as if she wished her hearer not to lose a syllable of her speech, "and allow me to present my card. It may be that my name is not wholly unfamiliar to you."

Violet took the handsome card and read thereon in bold, free letters, "Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith." A flush of pleasure rose to her cheeks as she extended her hand. "Do I then find myself honored by a visit from the well-known lecturess?" she asked.

Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith gave a very limp hand to the extended one, as she replied, "I am no other than the lecturer whose name you seem to be familiar with.

Pardon me for the correction, but, as you know perhaps by my lectures, I am in favor of equal rights and equal freedom for both sexes. Therefore I object to the terms doctoress, lecturess, poetess, etc. Those who adopt a profession are alike doctors and lecturers, irrespective of sex. Sex has nothing to do with the matter, and should be ignored so far as the profession goes. Not that I want women to lose their individuality—far from it. No woman need adopt a masculine attire or a masculine vice, simply because she follows a profession heretofore deemed masculine; but let her sex speak in her dress, in her voice, in her sweetness and grace of manner, and not in any '*ess*' tacked upon her professional name."

She paused and looked at Violet. "I understand you," Violet said, smiling, "and will remember your injunction in the future."

"And now," proceeded Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith, "I must proceed to the object of my visit. I am in the city for the purpose of forming an association of intellectual women, a sort of interstate conven-

tion, for the purpose of broadening woman's sphere of thought, and widening her range of vision, and enlarging her opportunities of culture."

"A very excellent undertaking," commented Violet, feeling the need of saying something appreciative.

"So we think who have undertaken it," replied Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith. "Our cities are teeming with girls and women, who, like yourself, are possessed of much crude talent, but have no opportunity to use it, and no real comprehension of their own powers. What we want is to bring them together, and by the contact of mind with mind, and the broader light poured in upon them by minds of higher cultivation, to break down the social barriers that now block their way to fields of greater influence, and means of higher culture. We want you to attend our meetings, and give us your aid."

"But I can do so little," objected Violet; "really nothing at all in such a place. I am afraid I must do my little part in this world

very quietly. I fear I am not meant to shine in any great assemblage of talent."

"That is owing to your cramped mode of thought!" responded Mrs. Odessa N. S., with a superior smile. "You are used to this narrow, contracted mode of existence and labor, and you shrink from a larger field. You fancy yourself doing your duty when you are simply throwing away your talents."

Violet flushed and her eyes sparkled. "No," she said, "I am not throwing my life or talents away. I am using them daily for the benefit of unfolding minds. There is no higher, no greater calling than that of an instructor of little children. If, to the best of my abilities, and according to my highest impulses, I lead and direct them, I am not throwing my talents away."

Mrs. O. N. S. smiled again her superior smile.

"But if your manner of thought is contracted, as it must be with your limited advantages, and your highest impulses those of the ordinary trammeled mind, on which the light of emancipation has not yet shone,

then you cannot be doing your whole duty by the children. Woman's mind is full of narrow aims and ambitions at the present time; what we want to do is to get upon the broader platform and reach a higher life. A few of us have attained it, and we are anxious to bring others up to our heights, to free them from the trammels society and a false education have imposed upon them; to teach them now to be as free as their fellowmen in their mode of life and their choice of a career."

"I am already in favor of a woman's enlarged sphere, and I believe in her right to any profession or trade she may choose," answered Violet quietly. "But I do not think we are all fitted for public life."

"We are all fitted for something better than these surroundings of yours," said Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith, as she looked about the room with a scarcely concealed shudder. "Ah, my child, you were named to me as a girl of rare force of character and unusual brain. But you are all in embryo yet. Your character is unformed, your tastes

lack refinement, your mind is uncultivated. The time will come, if you respond to the call I make upon you to come up higher, when you will shiver at the distasteful life and surroundings that you have left behind you, and regret the wasted talents that were thrown away upon unappreciative plebeians. I hope you will take your first step upward by a daily attendance at our meetings. We have arranged the time to accommodate those like yourself engaged in teaching, and our first meeting will be held in Blank's Hall, the first Monday morning of your vacation, two weeks hence. You will have an opportunity to meet some of the rarest minds in the State, for the most prominent of the emancipated sisterhood will be represented on this occasion. I shall hope to see you there."

With a bow and another light hand-clasp, Mrs. Nottingham Smith took her departure.

Little Violet was strangely absent-minded when Jessie presented herself that evening; her usual power of concentration, that made

her so successful with each moment's duty heretofore, seemed gone, and she felt restless and impatient for the child to go. This mood did not pass with a night's sleep, either. She carried it into her schoolroom the next day, and the next; and she dwelt upon Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith's words and grew to feel that her life was, indeed, a cramped one, full of petty aims.

"I am living a dull, narrow, treadmill existence," she said "and that I have been content with it heretofore and thought myself doing my whole duty, only proves how dull my finer feelings and aspirations have become. I might be filling a higher sphere, doing more good, thinking greater thoughts, and associating with a better class of people if I were only—well—*emancipated.* I shall be glad when vacation comes."

Vacation came, and with it the Inter-State Association of Emancipated Women. Violet was one of the first to enter Blank's Hall on Monday morning. It filled rapidly, and such a medley of striking people Violet had never seen gathered together before.

There were elegant women in long-trained dresses, and women with elaborate coiffures, and women with hair "shingled" and parted on one side. And all seemed full of business, and were gathered in little "cliques," and first and foremost, and everywhere present, was Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith. She smiled a welcome to Violet, and introduced her to Miss Jonas Winters, novelist, and the Honorable Mrs. Brown. Violet felt herself inclined to laugh at the very odd attire of the latter, which was a curious combination of masculinity and femininity; but her natural refinement, uncultured though it was, according to Mrs. O. N. S., forbade her doing so. She was somewhat surprised, therefore, to hear Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith remark, as the Hon. Mrs. Brown moved away to speak to a new-comer:

"What is the necessity of any woman's making such a guy of herself as Mrs. Brown does? She is really a ridiculous figure, is she not, in that nondescript suit?"

Violet did not answer save to ask the name of the lady who had just entered. She

was a very sweet-faced woman, with so kind a smile and so gracious a manner, that Violet felt her heart go out toward her involuntarily. Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith and Miss Jonas Winters, novelist, both frowned and drew back with sudden hauteur as their eyes fell on the newcomer.

"Really," cried Miss Winters, "I was not aware that she was coming. I wonder who invited her?"

"Not I," responded Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith. "I can assure you of that. She probably came uninvited. It is like her boldness."

"How lovely she is!" cried impolitic Violet; "please tell me who she is."

Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith frowned more forbiddingly than ever as she turned to answer Violet's query.

"That," she said with cold irony, "is Mrs. Burton. It may be you have heard her name in connection with a scandal which was in every one's mouth a few years ago. It may be you were too young to have heard it. I assure you I did not ask her to attend this

meeting, and I shall treat her in a way that she will not be apt to come again."

When the meeting was called to order and the preliminaries gone through with, the object of the meeting was discussed, and those who had papers to read were called upon to send in their names and the titles of their papers.

It so happened that Violet was seated next to Mrs. Burton, and that lady chanced to address her, and they fell into pleasant converse. Violet was charmed with her sweet voice and her gentle manners.

"I cannot associate her with anything evil," she said mentally, "and I believe she is a good, true woman. I don't see why those ladies found it necessary to tell me she had been a subject of scandal. There are precious few prominent people in the world who have not been more or less scandalized in some way."

Violet was invited by Miss Jonas Winters, novelist, to dine with her party at the hotel. Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith had gone to the residence of a personal friend

in the city, and was not one of the party ; as a consequence she came under discussion.

" How like a general she takes the lead," some one present observed.

" Yes, and who would ever have supposed she would have developed as she has," responded Miss Jonas Winters, novelist. " You know before her marriage she was not considered anybody. Her people were poor, and I am told quite illiterate. Her marriage was a fortunate thing for her. It enabled her to step into a position she could never have attained alone."

The tone was kind, the words full of approbation of Mrs. Smith's having made such excellent use of her opportunities. Yet all the same, Violet knew the motive that prompted the remark was an unworthy one. It was envy of Mrs. Smith's foremost place in the association, and her power of generalship; and every woman present made a mental note of the fact that Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith sprang from very low family.

The next day Violet chanced to be near

a knot of ladies who were nearly all strangers to her. They were discussing a paper which was to be read the following morning by Mrs. Gordon, a woman of marked beauty and brilliancy, who had occupied considerable time the previous day, and won much attention from the reporters who had been present by an eloquent and impromptu speech.

"It seems scarcely desirable that one person should monopolize so much time," remarked a lady in Bloomers near Violet.

"It is quite probable Mrs. Gordon may not be called upon for her paper," observed Miss Jonas Winters, quietly. "She has done her share, I think—we must give all a chance. No doubt the paper is excellent, but we can not hear all the good things at one session."

"I scarcely see how a woman who devotes so much time to toilettes as does the elegant Mrs. Gordon can do justice to an elaborate paper," observed Madam, Bloomer, with quiet sarcasm. "If women talk and write on emancipation, I like to see them illustrate it in their lives."

Violet looked for Mrs. Gordon's paper with considerable interest, but it was "unavoidably crowded out," so the minutes said, though several inferior ones could have been spared, and many aimless discussions might have been omitted with no detriment to the proceedings. But the wire-pullers who had resolved that Mrs. Gordon should not distinguish herself further, succeeded in keeping her paper in the background.

Mrs. Burton, whose sweet and lovable character seemed to breathe in every word and act, was by the majority of the ladies present treated with cold disdain. Those who had not heard the old scandal connected with her life, were informed that one existed, and that the originators of this association "regretted the presence of any person of that kind, as they claimed to be a blameless body."

"But is not the life of this woman beyond reproach now?" queried one daring dissenter. "Surely, whatever may have been her early errors and follies, she cannot be aught but a noble woman and wear the face she does;

besides, I have heard her highly spoken of by her neighbors."

"Oh, yes; since that old affair she has been very exemplary in her conduct—quite a model of propriety. But you know we do not care to admit a woman to our midst who has been so scandalized. We must maintain the reputation of the convention."

The last meeting of the convention was quite informal. Business being disposed of, and the session at an end, and the next place of meeting fixed upon and the new converts added to their ranks, the ladies made themselves generally agreeable, congratulating each other upon their separate and united successes, and the general uplifting and "cultivating" effect of the session.

Mrs. Odessa Nottingham Smith sought out Violet Gray.

"My dear," she said, "I do not see your name among our new members. I fear we have fixed upon a place of meeting so far distant that you will not feel that you can attend; but you know we want to give this rare opportunity to all alike. I trust, how-

ever, you have derived some benefit this session."

"I have, in one way," answered Violet, frankly. "I shall more than ever feel content in my own little sphere, and never sigh after a larger field; for I find as much that is noble in my narrow life, as much that must be appreciated by the Great Ruler, and less that is unworthy and belittling than I find in the lives of many of these emancipated women."

"Really!" cried the amazed Odessa; "really, Miss Gray, I must ask you to explain so strange an assertion. What have you heard at this session of the finest minds in two States that can be termed 'belittling,' I pray?"

"Gossip and malice," responded Violet quietly; "just what we are apt to hear where any large number of women meet together. I should have been prepared for it at a sewing-circle or a meeting of society women. But I confess I was unprepared to find it in this 'emancipated' congregation of fine minds. One of the first things to greet my

ear was an old, dead and cold scandal, concerning the most lovable and womanly member before the association. Next I heard of the low origin of one of the prominent members. Then I happened to overhear a few wire-pullers plan to keep a brilliant woman in the background, and they succeeded. I also heard an elegantly attired woman sneer at the masculine garb of one of her sister associates, and the sister associate in turn condemned the fashionable dress of still another. This is not emancipation from woman's trammels—this is not reaching the platform men occupy. Men do not meet at conventions to backbite and criticise, to rake up old scandals. They meet to exchange views, to combat each other if need be, squarely and fairly, but in good open warfare. You may succeed in opening the trades and professions to women by your papers and your speeches, but you will never succeed in becoming truly *emancipated* from the worst hindrance to woman's true culture and growth, until you rise to the moral height that scorns gossip, and puts all scandal, tale-

bearing and personal envy and jealousy down in the dust under your feet, where it belongs. You will never become broad-minded, as you desire to be, until you feel yourself so strong and safe and sure in your own unsullied virtue and moral worth, that you are not afraid to meet and exchange views with one whose past life may have been darkened by a cloud. I do not say, admit or countenance untrue woman to your midst; far from it. But I do say, treat women like Mrs. Burton with all due kindness, and encourage them to live the good life, and think the noble thoughts they are striving to, instead of holding back your garments and retailing to every newcomer some old tale of error. These are a few of the things that impressed me unfavorably, with your no doubt at the bottom excellent project, Mrs. Smith, and now I shall go back to my little round of duties, praying more fervently than ever to be kept from all envying and striving after vain-glory, and more than ever content and satisfied with the work given me to do."

"A strange, crotchety young person," Mrs. Odessa Nottinghim Smith was heard to call Miss Violet Gray, in speaking of her. "She seemed to possess latent powers, and an odd command of language, which was quite remarkable in its way. But there was no culture, and really, yes really, her tastes seemed distressingly low. No appreciation of higher things, you know, and curiously content with her common duties. Impossible to emancipate her."

Poor Violet!

A MENTAL CRIME.

Sitting here to-night, the possessor of great wealth, respected and envied by the neighboring people, I am yet more wretched than any convict behind prison bars.

For I carry in my breast the knowledge of an awful crime.

I caused the death of three human beings; yet no one on the face of the earth has ever suspected me as the author of that terrible tragedy.

Sometimes I think it would relieve the fearful burden on my soul if suspicion did point its finger at me; and so to-night I have resolved to write out the whole story just as it occurred; to paint myself in all the hideous colors of the murderer that I am.

After I am dead, let people read the story and bestow upon my memory the scorn it deserves.

I was but twelve years old, and he was

fifteen, when my mother married his father, and I was taken to the Pines—to this very old mansion where I am now sitting—to reside; his father, my stepfather, Colonel Monroe, had never seen me until I came there to live.

I had been at boarding school when he met, courted and married my mother. They went upon quite an extensive tour, returning to the Pines in June, and then I was brought home. How well I remember that summer evening! The grounds were all ablaze with roses as I drove up to the stately old mansion. Colonel Monroe, my mother, and Sinclair Monroe, my stepfather's son, stood on the veranda to welcome me.

After greeting my mother, she led me to Colonel Monroe.

"This is your new papa, dear Agnes," she said, "whom I hope you will love very much; and this is Sinclair, your new brother."

Sinclair bowed with a strangely polished air for so young a boy, I thought, and I smiled. I noticed that his face was very handsome and proud, and almost cold, until

he smiled. Then it was radiant as the June day itself. Colonel Monroe took my hand and leaned down and scrutinized my face.

"Bless my stars!" he cried out in a hearty voice, "what a beauty we have here! A perfect gypsy queen! Come, Sinclair, I should think you would like the chance to kiss such a cheek as that."

Sinclair blushed slightly, and came forward and shook hands with me then, but he did not kiss me. As we stood there facing each other, Colonel Monroe placed a hand on either head. "A handsome couple, Sybyl," he said, addressing my mother; "a handsome couple, surely. I think we will have to plan to keep them always with us. I should like to see them man and wife some day."

"And so, indeed, would I," my mother answered, smiling, "but it is early to think of that, Colonel. Let time do its own work." Then she led me away to my room.

From that time I began to think of myself as Sinclair Monroe's wife. We speak idle words in the presence of children,

and forget them, but the seed takes root in the young mind and silently grows into a harvest for good or evil.

I was to remain at the Pines to receive my education from private teachers. Sinclair was only home for his vacation, and in September he returned to college. We were playmates and comrades all through the long, bright summer. We used to ride two little ponies which his father had presented us with soon after my arrival, and one day Sinclair showed me the broad acres of his estate—the one which would be his when he attained his majority. "I shall build a splendid house there," he said, pointing to a noble eminence which overlooked the city, just below us, "a house larger, oh, ten times larger than the Pines, and I shall live there in the summer, and go to the city in the winter. I hate the country in the winter."

As we rode back I revelled in dreams of the future, when I should reign a queen over that splendid mansion.

As years passed on the idea strengthened

in my mind. Sinclair and I were always together when he was at home. He made me his confidante in all his college escapades, and we corresponded constantly. To be sure, he always addressed me as "Sis," an abbreviation of sister, I suppose; and he never kissed me in his life, save when he came home or upon his departure. Yet I always thought of him as my future husband, and I planned my life accordingly.

My mother was a poor widow when Col. Monroe married her. She had barely means enough to eke out our expenses, but she was very handsome and fascinating. She had what people called "a way with men" that was irresistible. She fostered the idea that I was to be Sinclair's wife. One day she and I were driving together about the estates, and she turned to me and smiled and said:

"How strange it is, ma petite, that you and I, two penniless creatures that we were a few years ago, will one day possess both these splendid estates for our very own. It is like a fairy story. Ah! say what they

will—the moralists and preachers—a handsome face and a little tact are the most priceless gifts a woman can possess. I am so thankful dear, that you are handsome."

I was seventeen when she said that, and I went home and looked at myself carefully in the mirror. Yes, I was handsome; my eyes were large and black, my complexion rich and clear, my features perfectly regular.

I turned away smiling and satisfied.

Sinclair came home soon afterward to remain; at least, he had finished his college course, graduating with honors.

He was very handsome, and my heart throbbed with pride and joy as I looked upon him.

Surely every good gift in life was mine.

Sinclair remained at home a year. We were of course thrown constantly together, and he was the same frank comrade as of old, yet he spoke no word of love. I grew restive and impatient for matters to be settled. I was at the age when every girl longs for a lover. I wanted to be loved—I wanted to be betrothed. I had thought it all out

many times; how after the betrothal my mother would give a large ball, and how resplendent I would shine in beautiful jewels and rich robes. For always in my thoughts of love worldly considerations were mingled.

I should never have loved Sinclair Monroe if he had been poor and of low birth. My pride was inborn, and constant cultivation rendered it one of the strongest elements of my nature.

After a year spent at home, Sinclair went abroad. He went without speaking his love, or asking any promise of me.

I was bitterly disappointed, and so was my mother.

"But let him sow his wild oats," she said: "he will come home all the more inclined to settle down."

He was gone two years. During those years I went much into society and became quite a belle, and received one offer of marriage. I declined it proudly. The man was in no way the equal of Sinclair; and besides I felt myself to belong to Sinclair. I as much as intimated this to my suitor, when

he would have persisted in his attentions.

When Sinclair returned he seemed older and more serious in manner, and he went at work at once to lay out the grounds on his estate and beautify them. My heart swelled full of hope.

Were my early dreams to be realized?

Then suddenly my mother died.

Plunged into deep mourning, I did not think it strange that no words of love should pass his lips during the next half year. At the end of that time he again absented himself for several months.

When he returned, he called me aside one day, saying he had something to tell me.

"Perhaps I ought not to say it within a year after your great loss," he began, "and yet I believe what I have to say will result in greater happiness to us all. I have long had it in my mind."

I felt my heart trembling in my breast like a frightened bird. At last, at last! Was he about to say the words I had waited so long to hear? Then he continued: "I

am going to be married next month, Agnes. I met my bride while I was traveling abroad. She is an American. She was also traveling with her parents. She is a lovely girl, and she will brighten up the old house for us all. I thought of building before I married, but father wants me to remain here, at least for a year or two. And I would like to have my bride plan her own home when I do build. I hope you will love her, Agnes. I am sure you cannot help it."

How I ever managed to control my awful mortification, my surprise and my anger, I do not know. It was all so sudden, so unexpected, like a blow in the dark. I brought all my pride to bear upon my emotions, and I congratulated him with seeming warmth, but I felt as if a new being took possession of my body from that hour. I had always been a selfish girl, inclined to be mercenary and exacting. Now within my breast awoke a demon of jealousy and spite that made my life wretched. It seemed to me that I had opened the door to a flock of evil spirits in my heart when love and hope flew out.

About two months later Sinclair brought home his bride. I felt a malicious gratification as I looked at her and saw that she was not as handsome as I. Yet she was what people generally call "sweet looking," or "lovely," and I have noticed that those women really win more hearts in this world than beauties do.

She was very affectionate by nature, and cuddled up to me like a winsome child at first; but I think she felt the hatred in my heart, hard as I tried to mask it, for after a time she ceased to make her affectionate overtures to me, and became more quiet and reserved.

Colonel Monroe was completely carried away with her sweet, kittenish manners, and I could see every day that she was winding herself more closely about his heart. He praised her constantly when he and I were alone, and I used to sit more and more by myself—it was such torture to hear his praises. As for Sinclair, he idolized her. I had never in my most romantic dreams imagined such a love as he gave to her.

Everything she did or said, every garment she wore, was perfect in his eyes; and he could not refrain from talking of her wonderful virtues to me.

I had to listen and endure it, although it was slow torture.

I felt a perfect hell in my breast often as I listened.

And yet in my own heart I had to confess that Millicent—that was her name—deserved all the praise she received.

She was constantly thoughtful for every one about her, and seemed to live only to make others happy. I never saw so unselfish a nature as hers. At first she used to make me her confidante, and tell me of her happiness in Sinclair's love, and dwell upon his virtues and goodness. But after a time she ceased that, too. I think she intuitively felt that I did not enjoy her confidence, and she drew more within herself.

As for myself, I used to actually hope and pray for some unhappiness to come between their hearts. I believe now that I did admit

an evil spirit to my breast, who constantly whispered devilish ideas in my ear.

Finally Sinclair began to build. Millicent was radiant with delight; and they were constantly making plans and talking of the new home, and Sinclair would ask me every now and then for a suggestion, but I always had some excuse to take me away.

It fairly maddened me to see her and hear her planning the house, that ever since my twelfth year I had believed would be my own.

One day we stood before a tall mirror together—quite by accident. I was struck by the difference in our faces. We were just of an age, but my selfish, mercenary, jealous and envious feelings had marred my face, until I looked almost ten years her senior. Nature had made me much the handsomer of the two, and yet I could see that she possessed tenfold the attractions I did at that time.

This only increased my hatred, and if I could have marred her features then and there with some terrible scar, I would have done it. Always in presence of Sinclair I

tried to appear kind and cordial, for I did not want him to read my mortified pride and wounded love, though now my love for him had turned into dislike. Since he belonged to her he was hateful in my sight.

But when I was alone with her I could not refrain sometimes from disagreeable and cutting speeches, which I knew hurt and wounded her. She was too noble to resent them, or to reply, but she shrank from me more and more. They were little, worthless remarks; yet a philosopher will feel the prick of a pin or the bite of a mosquito, insignificant as the pin and the insect are. In return she had always some pleasant speech or sweet word of praise to give me. I do not remember that she ever said an unkind word to me. Often I hated and despised myself for my feelings toward her; yet they had gone down so deep in my soul I could not root them out, and every day more and more I grew to think of her as an interloper—one who had thrust herself into the place which belonged to me. More and more I brooded

over the thought. "If she were not here—if only all this were mine!"

By and by a new cause of misery to me was added. There was to be ere many months passed another tie to bind her to Sinclair and Colonel Monroe.

When I realized this I felt a maddening fury take possession of me.

Little by little, unconsciously yet surely by the force of her own worth and her many virtues, she had crowded me out of the place I had grown to think was my own.

My stepfather worshiped her; Sinclair loved her to idolatry; and even the servants and the neighboring people could talk of nothing but "sweet Lady Millicent." I was thrust aside, slighted, forgotten. Yet it was my own fault. Nobody can help loving a sweet, smiling, unselfish and amiable person in preference to a black-browed, frowning, cold, selfish being. I had not made myself worthy of love, and I hated her because she had, and now she was to bestow a last priceless blessing upon the race, a blessing which

I had been denied the right of bestowing.

It would be her child, not mine, who bore the family name, who inherited the family estates.

How often I had in fancy seen my children playing on those noble lawns. Such a terrible rage filled my soul that I was almost like one mad.

And yet I was not mad. I do not lay any claim to that excuse. It was only the insanity of a jealous brain and a selfish, envious heart.

One evening, just in the gloaming, I walked down the garden toward a rustic seat near a large rose tree. In order to reach the seat I had to descend several steps. They were flat steps—cut from quarry stone, and brought and laid there. As I placed my foot on the second stair it tottered and tipped under my weight. There had been a severe storm recently, and the earth had washed away, leaving no foundation for the slab to rest upon. I fell as the step gave way beneath me and bruised my knee.

"I must tell John about this to-night," I thought, "and he must attend to it to-morrow. It's a dangerous place."

I sat down on the rustic bench. I had scarcely seated myself when I saw Millicent approaching with her basket and scissors; she was coming to gather roses to decorate the house.

As she neared the steps I was on the point of calling out to her to be careful, when the devil in my heart bade me be silent.

"Let her look out for herself," he whispered. "It is none of your business. If you had not come down here you would not be responsible for what happened to her, and she cannot expect you to follow her about to guard her from danger."

While the evil spirit whispered, it all happened.

She stepped upon the treacherous stone, it tipped under her weight and precipitated her forward upon her face. I ran to assist her to her feet, now thoroughly frightened and

horrified at my own wickedness, but she did not seem badly hurt, only slightly bruised.

"That is a dangerous place," she said; "John must attend to it to-morrow."

Even then at that moment it made me angry to hear her speak in such a tone of command concerning the premises and the servants.

That night the household was alarmed by the sudden illness of Lady Millicent. At dawn, in spite of the best medical skill, she lay dead, with her tiny dead infant upon her breast.

I was horrified at the result of my wicked silence. Yet the full punishment came later in the day.

During the afternoon the sharp report of a pistol sounded through the Pines. It came from the room where Lady Millicent and her babe lay robed for burial. Rushing thither we saw Sinclair, lying over the casket which contained the two silent forms. The pistol which had taken his life was still smoking in his hand.

Colonel Monroe followed them all to the

grave before two years passed. By his will I was lefted heiress of all those fine domains of both estates and of the Pines. My avarice was gratified. There was no other woman left to awaken my jealous feelings, or to mock me with her happiness.

And yet, I say again, no prison holds so wretched a creature as I am, and ever must be. The burden of my crime grows heavier and heavier as the years go by.

No living being suspects my guilt; but the dead know it, and often in the night they come close about me, accusing me of my sin.

I abhor life, yet I dread death, for then I must meet them face to face, with no veil between.

It would have been a less cruel punishment to have expiated my crime upon the scaffold.

To receive sympathy when you know you deserve punishment, to be respected when you know you should be abhorred, is the most awful fate that can befall a crime-burdened soul.

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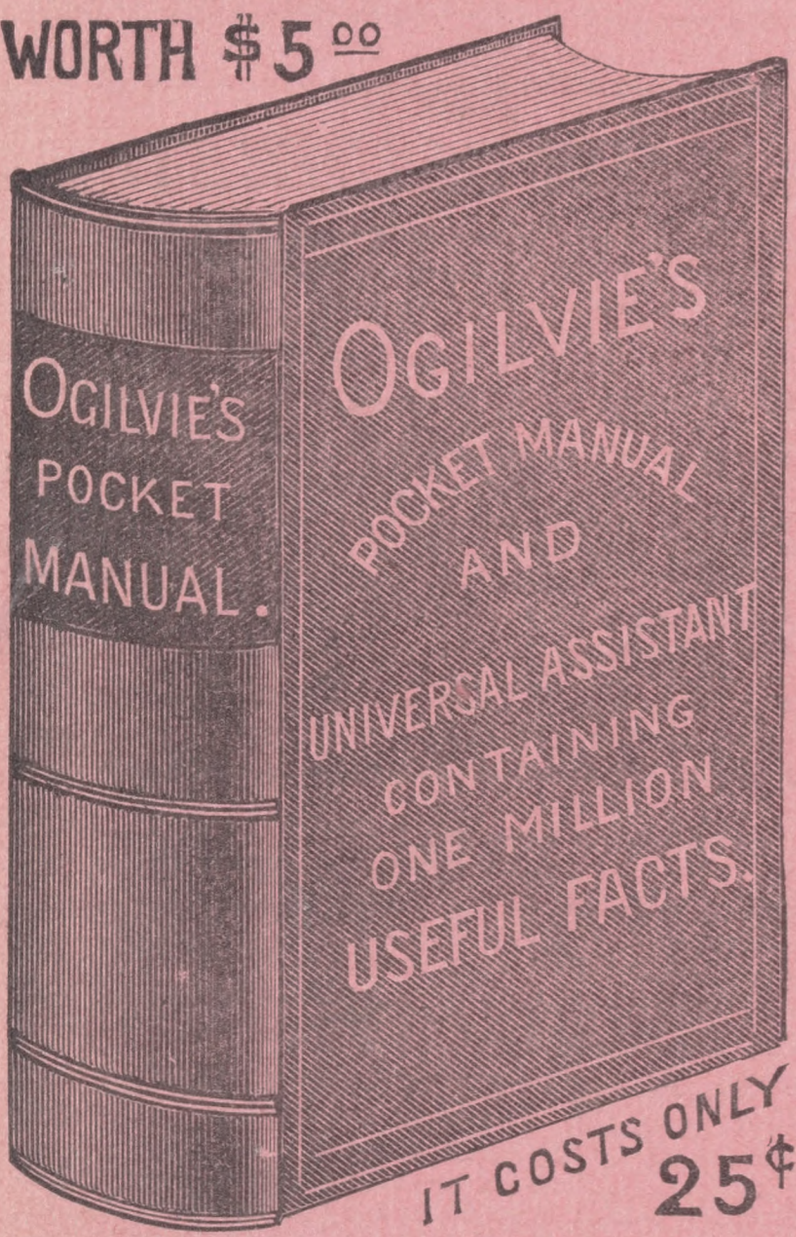
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